

# GLOBAL SOUTH

SEPHIS e-magazine Vol 9 No 2 APRIL 2013



Special Issue

## Everyday in the Global South



South-South Exchange Programme for  
Research on the History of Development

Vol 9 No 2  
APRIL 2013

SEPHIS

[www.sephisemagazine.org](http://www.sephisemagazine.org)



Volume 9  
No 2  
april 2013

Special issue  
Everyday in the  
Global South

# Content

3..... **Editorial**

## Articles

9..... **Nighat Gandhi**, *Journey of a Fast*

18..... **Soji Oyeranmi**, *Resistance and Anti-Colonial Sentiments in Popular Culture in West Africa: An example of Fela's Afrobeat*

26..... **Adrian Scribano & Victoria D'hers**, *Latin America: Body Memory and Cyberspace*

36..... **Nilanjan Bhattacharya**, *Living Like an Independent Filmmaker*

44..... **Niels Mulder**, *Philippine Vignettes: First Impressions*

## Photo Essay

53..... **Avik Mukhopadhyay**, *Memory of Images, Jadavpur*

68..... **Madhuja Mukherjee**, *House of Images, Sealdah*

## Report

83..... **Manas Ray**, *Report on the Cultural Studies Workshop*

## Book Review

88..... **Kingshuk Chatterjee**, *An Unusual Vignette*

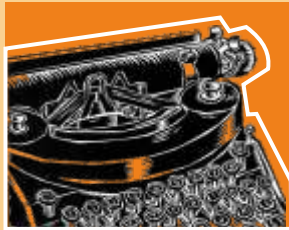
(Paul O'Connor, *Islam in Hong Kong: Muslims and Everyday Life in China's World City*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 2012)

91..... **Our Team**



# E ditorial

Volume 9 No.2 APRIL 2013



## Everyday in the Global South

As I sat down quite early this morning to write the editorial, a rain swept Kolkata woke up to the news of the sudden demise of Rituparno Ghosh (52), a critically acclaimed filmmaker. Phone calls from friends and text messages followed. Death is an unsettling matter. And I certainly do not belong to the stoic lot. I had met him once some time ago at my teacher's place on a similar rainy and overcast day. He had offered me sour mango salsa which he was carrying in a plastic lunch box. I had politely refused. The three of us had talked for two hours.

The day I had planned for myself instantly gets disrupted. I try hard to gather myself. I must finish this editorial. On the one hand synchronicity of events tumble down and one fights hard to keep steady through the day. On the other hand things continue to happen irrespective of what you feel and the places and people that surround you make their own demands. Such is the driving spirit of the everyday. It is the social matrix where our selves are nurtured, where we live our histories of conflicts and resolutions, and share our acts of domination or resistance.

Traditionally, the 'everyday' was not part of scholarship. Quotidian knowledge and ordinary lives were not deemed fit to be studied, recorded or critiqued. The realm of the mundane came into focus from the mid-late twentieth century with the work of Lefebvre (1981) and others. Daily life - its myriad patterns, ruptures and inconsistencies was taken into the philosophical folds of interrogation and conceptual understanding. Scholars and disciplines have struggled in their own ways to define and categorise the concept of the everyday. To quote Lütke (1995: 3-4): "...the central thrust of everyday historical analysis is the life and survival of those who have remained largely anonymous in history — the "nameless" multitudes in their workdays...." or as Highmore (2002: 1) observes: "...the everydayness of everyday life might be experienced as a sanctuary, or it may bewilder or give pleasure, it may delight or depress. Or its special qualities might be lack of qualities. It might be, precisely, the unnoticed, the inconspicuous, the unobtrusive."

Theories about the everyday have emerged from disciplinary backgrounds ranging from psychoanalysis to ethnography. Historians, Marxists, sociologists, ethnographers, feminists and others have formulated ways about how to read the everyday. Although general inquiries about the everyday have emerged from the Global North, path-breaking works like *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* are situated in the Global South. Both as a cartographic reality and conceptual category informing its geo-politics and the politico-social, the Global South is a challenging experience. Even in the general context, theorists and historians have faced enormous difficulties in addressing the everyday; exploring in any comprehensive way the scope of everyday in the Global South is a gargantuan task, if not impossible. Especially histories of colonial experience, anti-colonial struggles, labour, modes of production and the post-colonial contemporary have made the everyday of the Global South densely layered with myriad overlaps between phases. Moreover, the Global South is inflicted with questions of race, class, gender, ethnicity and caste which have divided and made experiences of the everyday very specific. Identities and differences based on essential ideas are often formed by practices of the everyday. A high caste Brahmin's day will be different in many respects from a low caste Dalit man's activities from sunrise to sunset. In fact, such differences speak to both structural differences in procuring socio-cultural resources, livelihood, as well as to complex questions of identity, social and cultural capital, such as religious affiliation or access to public welfare schemes. The narrative, necessarily, need not always be of passive victimhood. Experiences of struggles for various kinds of recognition against domination are part of the contemporary history. The repealing of Article 377 of the Indian Constitution a few years ago was a victory for the queer rights movement in India. It had come through after many decades of oblivion, distressing humiliations in everyday public and family lives, campaigns and activities of small groups with subterranean support networks. The revolutions in the Middle-East and North Africa, especially in Tunisia and Egypt also have shown that resistance follows from the everyday. Following the death of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, the 26-year-old vegetable trader who set himself on fire because police seized his grocery cart, a number of such incidents have taken place in Tunisia and in various cities of Egypt. Is it not the vulnerability of everyday lives pushed to its limits of tolerance that informs revolutions and sets the wheel rolling? When such an epoch-changing event occurs, generally there is a sense of disarray, lawlessness, and life out of gear—breads not ready in the morning, traffic nightmares, postponement of medical procedures, fear of imminent violence, death and mourning, routine television shows disrupted, Facebook pages turning out to be endless archives of ordinary lives debating the revolution, city walls depicting highly energetic graffiti etc. Does it change our perception of the everyday lastingly? Are these not moments when exceptional events like volunteering in a revolution or taking part in a protest march is transformed into the ordinary, the everyday? "If the 'shock of the new' sends tremors to the core of the everyday, then what happens to the sense of the everyday as familiar and recognizable? In modernity the everyday becomes the setting for a dynamic process: for making the unfamiliar familiar; for getting accustomed to the disruption of custom; for struggling to incorporate the new; for adjusting the different ways of living" (Highmore (2002: 2).

There is also much beyond the tangible: The everyday which does not take place in the streets is not open to public scrutiny but maybe recorded in different voices. Betty Friedan's 1963 classic *The Feminine Mystique*, hailed by many as the opening moment of second-wave feminism in the Northern hemisphere, questioned the valueless contribution by American middle-class housewives in everyday lives

ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: 'Is that all?' ” (Friedan 1965: 13). Friedan's called on women to find a commonality of experience towards changing the status quo of women's everyday which nobody seemed to care for. The challenge for women was to find other kinds of everyday which would expose what is different and to what degree. The challenge with graphing the ordinary and the everyday is that it is ubiquitous in nature and enmeshed in the complex web of the social.

As pointed out in the concept note for this special issue, since the late nineteenth century to the present, interpretations and representations of the everyday have moved over varied terrains of the national, communal to that of the private and profane. In the context of the Global South, the day to day, documented and undocumented, has been one of the richest sources of its cultures and feelings, densely weaved and heterogeneous. The ordinariness and lack of exceptional spaces that marks the everyday contribute significantly to the understanding of lives and cultures of people. The familiar often crosses path with the unfamiliar—assimilation and resistance informing activities, habits and consciousness— shaping our present.

Nighat Gandhi's article is written in a personal style and is reflective of her search for a self-knowledge regarding her own existence in a society that offers few opportunities for self-determination to women. There is a terse and constant negotiation between her self and the social construction of her womanhood. The Ramazan, ritual of fasting—an everyday practice carefully followed—is to Gandhi a way to growing self-awareness in the backdrop of global crises and contradictions that comprise a South Asian's life. When there is an increasing tension between global religions and its interpretations affecting lives of millions especially in the Global South, Gandhi's everyday of sacred fasting with its textures and hues brings home to her the essence of identity and contemplation of the present. The next article is from Nigeria, and it addresses addresses Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat career. Fela's highly influential yet controversial music career spanning two decades from the early seventies to the late eighties was international in scope. He became synonymous with radical protests against widespread corruption and unequal distribution of wealth in post-colonial Nigeria, Soji Oyeranmi argues that it is not surprising that Nigerians have designed several means of protesting and fighting against systemic failure that has kept them impoverished. Fela's Afrobeat was part of the popular culture, and it towered above all other genres in its commitment to the fight against oppression, suppression and humiliation of ordinary citizens in their everyday struggle. Scribano and Victoria's article from Argentina addresses cyberspace— another ubiquitous presence in our everyday lives. It is a study of how memory, body politics and cyberspace are shaped on the web, configuring political institutions, knowledge, and collective-action. The authors also propose a possible agenda for Latin American social sciences with respect to cyberspaces. The world wide web has been singularly influential on the one hand in connecting people to fight injustice or anonymously link up minority rights activists in remote Javanese islands; on the other it is also a primary tool for surveillance by groups or regimes. The everyday at the cyberspace has space for both domination and resistance. Nilanjan Bhattacharya's article from India is personal and fragmentary. It describes the everyday uncertainties in the life of an independent filmmaker. In South Asia there is very limited scope for the documentary genre, since it does not have access to multinational television channels. The article addresses the lack of space for the independent filmmaker. Where, one is not following whatever the market demands, themes, funding, distribution are unsure.

Independence is somewhat ironical. Nilanjan's journal expresses such times and ordinary anxieties of everyday lives. The article by Niels Mulder, who has spent decades researching the everyday of South-East Asian communities an excerpt from his extensive field notes which preceded his research project in 1983. He has worked among urban middle classes in Java and in Thailand. Everyday usage of language, religion, politics and protests form the core of the article. The town in which he conducted two years of field research is Lucena City, a Tagalog-speaking region some 130 km south of Manila, Philippines. His first impressions of the region, which he describes here are often at odds with his subjectivity as a male Dutch researcher. A new researcher's vulnerability is explored when Mulder is caught up in the web of a tumultuous time in Philippine history, the assassination of Benigno Aquino, Jr., a longtime political opponent of the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. The articles in this volume portraying the unconscious everyday, as conventional, fragmentary, range from the Ramazan fasting to reading life in a Philippine city in a rather extraordinary time. It also often privileges social structures, institutions and discourses (Highmore (2002: 5) and forms of resistance and non-conformity as represented in Fela Kuti's Afrobeat music or in the documentary filmmaker's anxieties of survival. Avik Mukhopadhyay's photo essay on the defunct National Instruments Limited (NIL) in Kolkata is a haunting journey into stillness and memory. One of the finest public sector companies manufacturing optical instruments in post-colonial India, NIL, discontinued production and all employees were forced to quit at short notice. He calls it a memorial of modernity, where suddenly, the everyday stops— production halts, lives melt away. How are they surviving— objects in cobwebs and lives in distress? The second photo essay by Madhuja Mukherjee takes the readers on a trip of old, defunct or nearly-defunct single-screen theatres in the Sealdah area, in Kolkata. Popular cinema has been an integral part of the everyday lives of people in West Bengal since the 1950s. Cine-goers across the class divide thronged theatres with their weekly screening schedules and cheap tickets. Since the late-nineties of the last millennium newer technologies, introduction of multiplex theatres, gradual downfall of the Bengali film industry in the nineteen eighties and nineties and other cultural factors led to the closing down of such single screen theatres in central Kolkata and in important neighbourhoods. Mukherjee, interestingly, does not lament such extinctions and is aware that transformations, however difficult to accept, will happen. Her photo essay reminds of a time past when a ticket or two to a vernacular romantic box office hit movie would have left an impression in the memory of the spectator. The report of the seventeenth cultural studies workshop held in January 2013, which had *Cultures of Everyday Life* as its theme, highlights the importance of such academic workshops in the region. Resource persons and participants from various academic institutions in India were part of the five-day deliberations. As part of the workshop, CSSSC (Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta), the organising institution, had also prepared a comprehensive course pack containing recent literature on the everyday. In the book review section, Kingshuk Chatterjee has reviewed *Islam in Hong Kong: Muslims and Everyday Life in China's World City* by Paul O'Connor. O'Connor's engagement with the city of Hong Kong and its multi-national Muslim population is an interesting read, says Chatterjee, because the author does not fall into the trap of redescribing Islam in terms of terror/discontentment. Rather O'Connor concentrates on the everyday lives of ordinary Muslims in Hong Kong. Such studies about global

communities of Muslims are rare in the contemporary East Asian context.

This special issue, needless to say, is not exhaustive and cannot possibly be, given the labyrinthine network and densely packed layers of experience that the everyday constitutes in the heterogenous Global South. Having said that, the issue, however, does give the readers a chance to mull over the endless threads of everyday, the mundane and the ordinary and to think of how we inscribe and re-inscribe our own everyday which add up to what we may call a lifetime.

*Hardik Brata Biswas*  
*Guest Editor*  
*May 2013*

---

### References

- 1 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III, From Modernity to Modernism: Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life*, Verso, London, 2008[1981].
- 2 James. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.
- 3 Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and the Cultural Theory, An Introduction*, Routledge, London, 2002.
- 4 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965[1963].
- 5 Alf Lüdtke, *What is the History of Everyday: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1995.



Special Issue

April 2013

**Everyday**  
**Global** *in the* **South**

Journey of a Fast  
Nighat Gandhi



# Journey of a Fast

Journey of a Fast is a South Asian Muslim woman's spiritual journey towards greater self-knowledge regarding her own existence in a society that offers few opportunities for self-determination to women. It charts the discovery of her true selves buried under her socially constructed self. The ritual of fasting undertaken as a spiritual practice during the month of Ramazan enhances this journey. Living in the midst of a world torn by violence and growing inequities inflicted due to poverty, wars, and economic injustice, she eventually comes to terms with her personal losses and simultaneous growing self-awareness in the backdrop of global crises and contradictions that comprise a South Asian's life. As her fasting progresses, she arrives at a place of inner authenticity, where contradictions co-exist with clarity and a paradoxical notion of the just universe.



Nighat Gandhi

Nighat Gandhi is a mental health counsellor and writer. She considers herself a citizen of South Asia. She was born in Bangladesh, spent her adolescence in Pakistan, and is coming of age in India. She is the author of *Ghalib at Dusk and Other Stories*. Her non-fiction, *Alternative Realities: Love in the Lives of Muslim Women*, a travelogue/memoir based on her conversations about love during her sojourns in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is forthcoming from Westland, New Delhi, in late 2013. Email: [nighat.gandhi@gmail.com](mailto:nighat.gandhi@gmail.com)

The alarm goes off. It is 4 am, still dark when you get out of bed and find your way to the kitchen. You make a pot of tea and heat up a *roti* (flatbread) in the microwave for a quick *sehri* (meal eaten before fast begins). You are alone, your hosts are away, their house is quiet and dark and motionless except for the swinging lampshade over the dining table. You eat the *roti* with mango jam and gulp down lots of water. You will not be able to eat or drink again till sundown. Your stomach feels distended like a leather water pouch. No matter how much you drink, you will not be able to retain it through the day. You simply drink out of fear of later thirst. Daytime temperatures are soaring in the 40s. *Ramazān* (the Muslim month of fasting) this year has arrived at the height of summer, and a typical fasting day spans fifteen hours.

It is 4.30 am when you hear the *azaan* (prayer call) from the nearby mosque. It is a signal to stop eating. You take your last gulp of water. It is still dark when you settle down in a rocking chair next to the window and wait for the first sign of daybreak. You converse silently with the Friend. It is a strange, sacred time, the pre-dawn hour. The window creaks on its hinges in the morning breeze and its sweet, rusty creaking takes you into some unexplored space beyond. You hover in that space beyond your body. Faded sounds from childhood *Ramazāns* float up- your beloved *Dadiamma* (grandmother) waking you up, making you eat sweetened *lacchi* (vermicelli) soaked in milk. You fondly recall *sehri*s with her and your aunts and uncles. It was such a long time ago when you lived in that courtyard house with the leaky roof with your parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles, a time when living seemed decidedly easier.

Quietly you waft back to the present and wait for this morning's sounds- the comforting call of the koel, the swish of the broom in the neighbour's garden. The fronds of the banana tree sway in the window pane like whirling dervishes. This hour when the fast begins is a sacred hour as are the minutes before the fast ends. Both times are boundary-crossing times. About moving on, about transitioning. The banana fronds are like dervishes whose bodies and souls whirl, always on the move, never staying too long in any one station.

You recall that dervish is a Persian word meaning one who is poised at the boundary of two worlds. The dervish is one who waits at the threshold between the corporeal world and the non-corporeal world, with her body in the corporeal world, and her soul in constant awareness and keenly reaching out to the unseen, non-material world.<sup>1</sup>

A soft, faint light falls on the pages of the notebook in which you are scribbling. The neighbouring houses that surround this house lie in darkness. You watch their mute, brooding facades. This is not the time for sleep, this is the hour of knowing, the hour of awakening. Perhaps the inhabitants are awake and praying inside dark rooms. The planet with its seven billion inhabitants, its flora and fauna, even its wondrous bacteria that outweigh the mass of people, animals and plants, this wondrous planet with its mountains and rivers and clouds, is also a dervish, ceaselessly whirling. You experience its motion best at boundary times. Dawn and dusk fill you with deep reverence. The dervishi planet has been whirling, and will continue to whirl for you cannot say how long. Not knowing, lacking certitude, living with tentativeness lends a new, hitherto unexplored dimension to all your knowing. A knowing that's outside the bounds of language.

You are grateful to witness the planet's dance in this wondrous moment. You feel you are a part of its unfolding dance from eternity to eternity. You recall Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan singing the *hamd* (poem praising God):

*Talash us ko na kar buton mein,  
Woh hai badalti hui ruton mein,  
jo din ko raat aur raat ko din bana raha hai,  
wahi khuda hai.*

Do not seek (God) in the materiality of this world,  
For (He) resides in the changing of seasons,  
He who is transforming day into night, and night into day.  
He is God.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of dervishes, those at the threshold of two worlds, are you not also flitting between two worlds? You are perhaps no dervish, but you left behind a familiar world, and are poised at the threshold of an unfamiliar world. It is not a comfortable space. This transitional space, its unknown contours make you crave knowing, the old desires still cling to you to see yourself established, predictably settled. At your age, middle age, you are expected to be in a well-defined position, if not as a professional, then at least as a wife and mother. But you are positioned neither in the home nor in the world. You have left that world of the familiar, not able to make peace with your culturally assigned role in it, but as yet have no credentials in the not-so-familiar world. You feel uncertain. Not alone. Just uncertain.

Looking for guidance in books to offset your uncertainty, you come across this:

The person who already feels a lack of wholeness has received a gift from heaven... it is a positive sign... the important thing is to be true to oneself; never to relent in one's quest for wholeness. The great danger is a kind of momentary and passing state which appears as equilibrium or a small degree of wholeness, and which leads to forgetting that this was just a step or a station house on the path, not the goal. The danger is to become consolidated and petrified in that station.<sup>3</sup>

Words you repeat: *quest, wholeness, never relenting, being true to oneself*. These are states you want to cultivate. Words and states you are not meant to get stuck in: *equilibrium, forgetting, consolidated, petrified*. And yet, how you crave the deceptive equilibrium of those stations that announced small degrees of wholeness!

You are wavering at the crossroads of the inner and outer. Disenchanted with the outer but not quite sure of the inner's value, success in either eludes you. You ask yourself: what is real success? Why is it important to be successful? Certainty and semblance of success in the outer world, reaching equilibrium, ease, stability- is that what you seek? But these are outer states that mean consolidation, prettification. Death for your inner world! So you continue to waver, hip-hopping across the borders of inner and outer, eking out an uncertain existence even as your soul keeps prompting you to forsake the outer, and to delve deeper into the inner. There is something you sense acutely in your solitary hours, but consciously know its topography very little. Years of modern education has not prepared you to become aimless, to listen, to watch, and wait. You know about setting goals, about working hard, achieving results. But waiting without tangible goals or results?

To navigate your inner terrain, you almost need another vocabulary, one without words. Words like goals and results have to go. You need to honour yourself as your own guide. Guiding yourself through moments of absolute quietude, in those boundary moments at daybreak and dusk, in the chair by the window, from the dervish-like fronds of the banana tree you receive quick-to-vanish intimations. Wordless intimations. Does the rational critic in you accept the truth of these no-language, non-word, formless intimations?

Adrienne Rich speaks to your equivocations:

*force nothing, be unforced  
accept no giant miracles of growth  
by counterfeit light  
trust roots, allow the days to shrink  
give credence to these slender means  
wait without sadness and with grave impatience<sup>4</sup>*

Trust your own roots, give credence to slender means, wait without sadness, wait with grave impatience? Is Rich asking you to wait and listen and trust that formless, inner landscape called intuition?

### **Voluntary Hunger**

When you decide to fast, you have already listened to that wordless, intuitive voice. It is Ramazan and you decide you will fast even though you are not a ritually inclined devout Muslim, and you have never been regular about fasting. Self-chosen hunger might heighten the state of dreaminess for a stumbling

wayfarer like you, one who is exploring the geography of her inner world. Your analytical, logical left-brain interferes with rituals such as fasting. You counter its scepticism: Eating three meals a day is also a highly ritualistic regimen. What is normal about that? You take up fasting as a challenge to your physical stamina: How many days can you fast at a stretch, how many fifteen hour days can you go without food and water? How well can you overcome your caffeine-addiction? The left-brain is satisfied with the challenge. Goals and results.

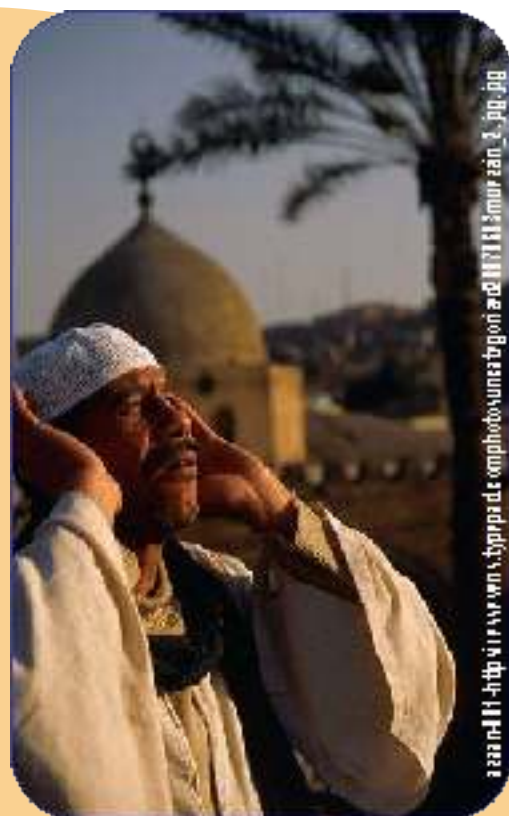
On the first day of fasting your empty stomach heaves from hunger and by mid-day the mind registers plaintively, *Oh, no! No tea till evening.* It is a physical and emotional loss. You are in mourning. You expect to have a throbbing caffeine headache. But you surprise yourself by not getting one. There is a lot you discover about the enslavements of the body. That pot of tea to go with the reading of the morning papers, those habitual three meals a day. Lunchtime. Around lunchtime you reason with your growling stomach as you would with a spoilt child. You watch it growl, and you watch its growling subside slowly, unwillingly. The interruption of meals and snacking between meals, rituals of unmindful eating are suspended, freeing up surprise-filled moments of emptiness. Moments of wonder. By late afternoon, a sweet, intoxicating weakness. Your left brain registers it as a side-effect of dehydration, but you sense in this trance-like, awake-asleep state something else. The chattering of your frenetic, questioning brain is silenced. This contemplative quietness carries within it insights that the post-lunch, nap-inducing lethargy of your normal, non-fasting days does not.

More unexpected surprises arrive as the fasting progresses. Your body takes you on a daily journey of solitude. You call it the *veerani* of the body- its solitude. The body, deprived of all its preoccupations, time spent thinking of, shopping for, and preparing meals, and time spent eating, and the resultant satedness—the body opens up feeling fresh, young, wondering: *What am I? What am I for?* The *veerani* makes the body tune into its innermost quiescence. The body at rest from externally located preoccupations translocates itself into a field of light and spirit. The body becomes an almost body-less body.

You debate during those stretchy, long days of fasting- should you strive to acquire those worldly markers of success and stability- a new job, new friends, a new profile on Facebook to launch yourself into your new life? Or should you coil into yourself, turn into a contemplative bundle, sit still and attend to the *veerani* of the body? There is the constant meddling from your rational, linear, left-brain. You are a rational being, unwilling to just sit back and wait aimlessly. You come up with judgments for yourself. Laziness, low motivation, low spirits, indecision, menopausal depression. You want the diagnosis of depression for yourself. But no, a weak, stubborn voice from your depths protests: Do not reduce your sadness to a clinical, treatable diagnosis. Do not degrade sadness by medicalising it. Yours is an existential sadness, the sadness of existence.

Minimising it to a treatable medical condition is denying it its dignity. Call it by another name- a necessary dreaminess, and allow yourself to stay with the dreaminess. See where the body's solitude takes you. Sit still in its inner room, listen to the echoes of your intuition, the voice of higher guidance. Whether out of sheer emotional exhaustion or the rigours of daily fasting, you seem to have no choice but to drown in hunger-encouraged dreaminess.

You remember reading about the ten benefits of voluntary hunger or fasting in a translation of a medieval Sufi text, *Kimiya-i-Saadat* (Alchemy of Happiness) by the twelfth century Sufi philosopher and psychologist, Al-Ghazali. You stumble across the translation online. The ten benefits of voluntary hunger



according to Al-Ghazali comes as an explanation of your fasting-enhanced dreaminess. According to Al-Ghazali, the first benefit of voluntary hunger is a ‘purification of the heart and awakening of intuition, as well as giving vent to perception’ and its opposite, satiation ‘causes dullness and blinds the heart. It increases fuzziness in the brain, in the same manner as does drunkenness, until it overpowers the elements of thought, burdens the heart, and slows down both the thinking process and quickness of perception’.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to your reading of Al-Ghazali, you have more respect for your vagueness, your indecisive dreaminess. If this vastness and emptiness of the fasting body were merely a purely physical phenomenon, would Al-Ghazali recommend going hungry so emphatically? For Al-Ghazali, hunger is a spiritual tool. The body’s echoes are enhanced by hunger as emotional and psychic communications. Hunger tunes the body to perceive and receive the Other.

Your emotional states are linked to your physiology. How you react to an irritating situation on an empty stomach is different from how you react with a full stomach. Some days, while fasting you feel so weak, you do not have the energy to react irritably to anything. Nothing has the power to tick you off. Some days, physical weakness makes you so irritable, you snap at the slightest thing. Your reactions vary from day to day. You are uncomfortable with your own unpredictability because you like consistency. An emotionally mature adult is expected to be consistent and you want to think you are an emotionally mature adult. But this estimation is challenged by fasting. Fasting is like walking an emotional tightrope. There is no guarantee of an emotionally balanced fasting self. It is a goal to be mastered. You begin to understand why fasting has been called one of the most challenging and transformational spiritual exercises for the seeker of Truth.

You rouse yourself from your trance-like state in the late afternoon, and enter the kitchen to prepare *iftar* (meal eaten at the end of a fast) and you feel the contours of your stomach collapsed and shrunk against your abdominal wall. Your walk has slowed down and your speech has slowed down too. Slower speech means you speak in a more thoughtful, restrained way. Mindful speech is an etiquette of fasting. You are promised closeness to God when you speak less. More importantly, you are to speak only when necessary, speak less than you normally do, or better not speak much at all while fasting. There is the gift of sharper perception for those who restrain unnecessary speech.

Al-Ghazali lists heightened sensory perception as a benefit of curtailing unnecessary speech. You notice that your ability to notice extraordinary aspects of ordinary sensory stimuli is sharper. For example, fruit. As you peel and slice fruit, you *sense* the fruit. You are not seeing the colours and textures. You *sense* colour and texture. The creamy white of melons, the glistening saffron of mangoes, the dense, dark brownness of dates, all so familiar as to be unnoticeable, bloom as colours and shapes and textures speak through your hunger. The translucent crimson of Rooh Afza entrances you through the screen of condensed mist on the glass.

You sit still in the growing dusk. Only a few minutes left before the fast ends. After a hot and humid day, the breeze is cool and birds are clamouring for nightly shelter. Sitting in the garden, cradling the collapsed, crouching emptiness of your stomach, you meditate on your hunger. The koel sings. You lean back and look up at the stray wisps of clouds. A few kites are floating freckles in a smooth-skinned sky. The inviting smell of pakoras frying in the neighbour’s kitchen raises your olfactory attention. It is almost time for the *azaan*, and you wonder at the weakness of the body, its one-pointed focus. The clanging of pots and ladles from neighbouring kitchens become eager sounds. You hear the lady of one house call out to one of her helpers: “It’s almost time. Come get your *iftar*.” And then just before you



hear the first notes of *azaan* from the mosque, an eerie hush submerges all other noises in a mysterious, momentary silence. In those moments you feel close, very close to the Friend.

### *Al-Ghazali and All-you-can-eat Iftar buffets*

The *azaan* at sundown announces the end of fasting. Another boundary moment. You say *Bismillah* and step back into the house and take the first sip of chilled lemon Rooh Afza, and bite into your first date. Dates, melons, mangoes, and pakoras fill your stomach with surprise and gratitude. You succumb to the temptation of over-eating, giving yourself wholly to wonderful tastes and textures. Your taste buds are loud and expressive. Their eagerness registers in an intensified way on your hungry tongue. You are not sure if you taste food with your tongue or with your mind. Is tasting a physical or a mental phenomenon? How strange to rediscover that taste is not an absolute and inherent property of food itself, but a neural and emotionally mediated experience, interpreted by the mind through deprivation, through bodily senses. At the end of each fasting day, you taste the absolute truth of this revelation.

You are a different person after food. Sated. Bloated. Less intense. Less contemplative. More opinionated and judgmental. You go for a walk to the neighbourhood park. Living outside the park is a displaced family. The children, and they are of varying heights and ages, are the usual children of poverty: Snot-nosed, bare-footed, distended bellies. You stop and converse with the parents. They lost their home in the village to pay off a money lender. They moved to the city to find work and another home. They came to this city to find work and shelter? This mega-metropolis that can barely feed and house its millions. Naive. Foolish. Why do they have to have so many children? Your mind is judging, is dismissive. You hand them the food packets you brought. Your compassion is tinged with cynicism. Gone is the seamless sense of oneness in which you were embedded with all of existence earlier. On the walking track, you feel discomfited, you question, you are guilty and ill-at ease with the juxtaposition of such needless poverty against your own easy plenitude.

When you are hungry, you tend to be more compassionate, more accepting of life's vicissitudes. You are not driven to engage the faculty of reason in debates normal for a well-fed body. There are a lot of contradictions in the news to mull over: A billion people, every seventh person on the planet now is chronically hungry.<sup>6</sup> Closer to home, clashes between terrorists and security forces and the fallout of drone bombings by the United States in poverty-ridden Waziristan region of Pakistan is converting Pakistanis into internally displaced persons, refugees in their own land.<sup>7</sup> Increasing numbers of citizens of northwestern Pakistan are succumbing to mental illness. Subscriptions by Peshawar psychiatrists for anti-depressants and anti-anxiety drugs have doubled in the age of the Talibans.<sup>8</sup> You stare at the heart-wrenching photograph of four-year old Sana Lalbro from terrorism-torn Bajaur trying to recite a prayer in a camp for internally displaced persons. Poor Pakistani families in Sind are selling their daughters as young as ten into marriage with grandfatherly men for a few thousand rupees.<sup>9</sup>

The same newspaper where you see the four year old, also advertises sumptuous *iftar* buffets, all-you-can-eat deals in air-conditioned opulence of the city's five-star hotels. Your phone beeps. Another advertisement arrives: A sea-front restaurant wants to entice you with a free boat-ride after *iftar*. An *iftar* for two will cost you the average monthly wage of a domestic servant. You can go on listing contradictions. To rationalize the contradictions, to explain largely man-made global inequities is not the point. Rationalising would be akin to offering facile explanations for inhumanity of humans. You are struggling to understand something else, trying to touch that universal core of compassion, by practicing something seemingly insignificant: Voluntary hunger. You are trying to soften your heart, curb your egotistical self, live in a state of gratitude. Your experience of what hunger *feels* like in the mind-body is not an attempt to seek an answer to the disquieting, puzzling phenomenon of human greed and evil.

You recollect a quote by the mystic musician, Hazrat Inayat Khan: *It is simpler to find a way to heaven than to find a way on earth.* There is a mystery and learning embedded in helpless pain. Finding a way to that mystery is meant to be difficult. When you get disillusioned with the state of the world, you are not to seek simplistic answers in the theories economic and political pundits expound. Perhaps the Friend wants you to struggle to understand the pain and master the mystery in your own way rather than scramble for a quick exit from what seems an abhorrent and unjust world.

### *Nothing but my selves?*

What do you do with yourself in those long hours when time stretches and expands inside your body, and you feel ballooned out as an extension of space-time? You ask a friend. She uses the word *ethereal* to describe that expansive state of emptiness. And *suspended* is another word you come up with for that transcendent evening hush just as the fast is about to end. You are suspended between reality and unreality then, between hunger and satiation, between conscious and non-conscious perception, between alertness and a fading of alertness. It is not about hunger at that point, or thirst, or weakness. Your body and spirit feel tamed, and yet strengthened. Wide awake. You feel the wakefulness, like a body that is coming home to a new self. You remember reading that when you reach the station of no station, 'there is no tongue, no property, no name, no attribute- only sheer stupefaction and utter muteness.'<sup>10</sup> Stupefaction and muteness are the states of your body.

Still you wonder if you are excusing your laziness. You are not socially or intellectually productive- not writing, or engaged in any kind of meaningful activism to end world poverty or hunger. You read, you fast, you meditate. Is it all right to be so unengaged? There is nothing concrete to show for all your fasting, reading, meditating. Nothing quantifiable. Nothing other than the sense you have of having grown in inner stillness helped on by days of fasting. There is an ethereal dreaminess to this stillness which makes you stiller than normal, physically weakened but awakened. You doze off in the afternoons wondering what is and what is not useful, purposeful engagement?

From such a dozing state you are awakened by a wordless voice that keeps repeating: Stay with the dreaminess. Whose voice is it? It seemed like your own. It did not say stay with the *laziness*. It said, stay with the *dreaminess*. What you were dismissively calling your laziness is perhaps the dreaminess you are meant to stay with. A dreamy, budding, creative state, it may lead to further creative openings. You listen, but continue to question the voice. Much later you come to accept it as a divine gift, though a tiny sliver of doubt still remains.

The next morning you open an English translation of Ibn Arabi's *Bezels of Wisdom (Fusus-al-Hikam)* at random. You are not sure why you are consulting another medieval Sufi text written almost eight hundred years ago. The answer comes in the form of a long footnote in the second chapter. Caner Dagli, Ibn Arabi's contemporary American translator, explains what "spiritual hearing" means:

The word ma'na can also be used to refer to the inward faculties of man as opposed to his outward faculties. One's "meaning" hearing is the dimension of the Heart that forms the principle of one's sensory hearing. It is one's spiritual hearing. Often when Ibn Arabi speaks of something occurring "in meaning" he means that it occurs in one's soul as opposed to manifesting outwardly. The meaning is the inward reality at work in the outward, the formless in the form, the hidden in the apparent.... Form and meaning interweave and together comprise the objects of the world and hence the objects of our knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Thanks to this long footnote, which extends to more than a page, thanks to Caner Dagli, you begin to trust the formless messages of dreaminess, the voice of your 'spiritual hearing.' What you get from Ibn Arabi is that God's voice and yours are inextricably entwined, the one and same, so what God wills for you to hear, you appear to hear within yourself. Since you could only understand God's message in some sensory form, you hear it as a voice. If it did not materialise as a voice, how would you get its meaning? So what you heard was the voice of inner guidance? Intuition? Yes. Your soul is part of God, the soul's voice is the voice of intuition, the voice of God.

*Stay with the dreaminess.* No reasons as to why you should stay with the dreaminess. Just the injunction to stay with it. Your doubts are laid to rest after reading Dagli's footnote. Every intuitive message is God's self-disclosure to humans according to Ibn Arabi. Your hearing that wordless, inner voice and coming upon an explanation in a book about what you have heard are mysterious and miraculous events; and yet they are not events because God's communication with you is constant.

As to the question of timing: Why now? Why so late? The answer is: Because this time, this now

is the most perfect *now* for revealing what needs to be revealed. If these revelations came earlier, you would not have been able to tolerate their impact. You were too young, too immature, too emotionally unstable, ruled by the whims of your intellect and your ego. Suffering was a part of the path to your self-evolution. Failures came to shatter the illusions created by your ego, the seeking of ambition, recognition, the illusions of youthfulness, popularity, beauty. The path to selfhood lay through stations of suffering. You were meant to pass through them, but not get stuck in them. You were not to confuse those stations with destinations. Marriage and motherhood were milestones on the path to growth and clarity. All along, you received *what* you were prepared to receive *when* you were prepared to receive it.

Self-acceptance comes at last! Fasting has showered many insights. You are less afraid of the opinion of others, no longer interested in proving yourself to the world, or winning the world's approval, and though your ego is far from annihilated, you can observe its antics more dispassionately. You can get on with life's ride in a way that makes you the mistress of your journey. Travel at your own pace. If some days the message is to simply stay with the dreaminess, you stay with the dreaminess. And recollect your gifts. Courage. Clarity. Compassion. Creativity.

A "wild patience" has brought you this far and it had to take this long! Adrienne Rich again. Who can say what you feel as forcefully, as gently as she does:

*A wild patience has taken me this far.  
but really I have nothing but myself  
to go by; nothing  
stands in the realm of pure necessity  
except what my hands can hold.  
Nothing but myself?... My selves.  
After so long, this answer.*

Later in the day, sitting on a mattress with your back propped up against the wall, you catch your reflection in the mirror. Earlier you saw only the self that held sadness, tiredness, and pain. Today you still see that self, but you also see the new selves. Resting in stillness. And something radiant under the stillness. You cannot say where these still or radiant selves come from, but their beauty is like lamplight on a misty evening emerging from the *veerani* of your innermost self.

- 1 Shakina Reinhertz, *Women called to the path of Rumi: The way of the whirling dervish*, Hohm Press, Arizona, 2001.
- 2 Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan: wohi khuda hai. To listen to the hamd/hymn go to the URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h2DqK1n3fM> accessed on 14 August 2012.
- 3 The Long Journey: Interview with Syed Hossain Nasr in Chittick, W. (2007) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Islamic Tradition*, Morning Light Press, Sandpoint, ID, USA. , p 232.
- 4 Adrienne Rich, Spirit of Place, URL: <http://aspaceforfreedom.blogspot.in/p/poetry.html> accessed on 1 October 2012.
- 5 The ten benefits of hunger by Al-Ghazali. URL: <http://www.mysticsaint.info/2012/08/the-10-benefits-of-hunger-imam-ghazali.html> accessed on 14 August 2012.
- 6 Raj Patel, 'A Fierce Drought', *DAWN*, 26 July 2012. URL: <http://dawn.com/2012/07/26/a-fierce-drought/> accessed 12 October 2012.
- 7 Fallout of drone attacks. URL: <http://dawn.com/2012/07/27/fallout-of-drone-attacks/> accessed on 12 October 2012.
- 8 Pakistan: Millions bear mental scars from attacks. URL: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/pakistan-millions-bear-mental-scars-attacks> accessed on 12 October 2012.
- 9 Girl sold in marriage killed by in-laws. URL: <http://dawn.com/2012/07/17/girl-sold-in-marriage-killed-by-in-laws/> accessed on 12 October 2012.
- 10 Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992, p. 94.
- 11 Caner Dagli (Translated), *Fusus-al-Hikam by Ibn Arabi*, Great Books of the Islamic World, Kazi Publications, 2004.
- 12 For Adrienne Rich's poem go to URL: Integrity. <http://jamelah.net/2011/08/31/patience/> accessed on 12 October 2012.





Special Issue

**Everyday** *April 2013*  
**Global** *in the*  
**South**

Resistance and Anti-colonial Sentiments in  
Popular Culture in West Africa: An Example  
of Fela's Afrobeat  
Soji Oyeranmi

## Resistance and Anti-colonial Sentiments in Popular Culture in West Africa: An Example of Fela's Afrobeat

In spite of the abundant human capital and mega oil economy, day to day life of average Nigerians remains dismally miserable and unbearable as more than seventy per cent of them live below poverty line. Internally people are groaning unabatedly under the hardest economic burden. It is therefore not surprising that Nigerians have designed several means of protesting and fighting against systemic failure that had kept them impoverished. And one such channel is the popular culture where Fela's Afrobeat has towered above all other genres in voicing concerns in the fight against oppression, suppression and humiliation of the common man. This essay intends to briefly look at the man and the inspiration/ history behind his message, evaluate the impact of Afrobeat on the consciousness of people then and now, and bring out the values the present generation are drawing and can still draw from Afrobeat.



Soji Oyeranmi

Soji Oyeranmi is currently a doctoral student in environmental history at the Department of History, University of South Africa (UNISA). He also teaches at the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University (formerly, Ogun State University), Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria. His areas of interest include environmental history, diplomatic history, historiography, peace studies and development studies. Email: [soj400@yahoo.com](mailto:soj400@yahoo.com)

## Introduction

“*The history of Liberty is a history of Resistance*”

- Thomas Woodrow Wilson <sup>1</sup>

“*Before we can attain a life of Comfort (Liberty), we must prepare to fight for it ....*”

-Fela Anikulapo Kuti <sup>2</sup>

Although there is no universally accepted definition of popular culture but according to Wikipedia it finds its expression in the mass circulation of items from areas such as sports, fashion, films, literary works and music with global acceptability. With this *vox populi* nature, popular cultures therefore become “responses to social anomie, mission impact, political and economic oppression, and need to revitalize traditional culture”<sup>3</sup>. Afrobeat which is the focus of this essay is a popular musical genre originated and popularised by Fela Anikulapo Kuti of Nigeria. And according to Albert Oikeme (1986) Afrobeat has been accepted globally as a unique popular musical typology.

Popular music as an integral part of popular culture has been defined by different scholars. Bryne (1975) and Pen (1992) defined it as generally acceptable to a particular group or society. This type of music derives its force of appeal not only in the harmonious blend of rhythm and sound but often from its linguistics and thematic contents. Amisssah (1986) sees popular music “as a brand of music used as a means of propagation and integrating the right values in the community.”<sup>4</sup> In this regard Afrobeat towers above other forms of popular music in Nigeria. According to Potgieter (2003) Afrobeat has several dimensions, namely: Social, philosophical and artistic. Most importantly, Afrobeat is about Africa and its masses—its impoverishment, resistance, resilience, triumphs and its ultimate salvation. Johnson (2001) is of the opinion that:

Afrobeat philosophy is the perfect use of militarism, vocal strength, and Pan African ideas (of Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, Kwame Ture etc.) with the ability to shift thematic indignation from a soft romantic indignation to an aggressive reflection <sup>5</sup>.

## Fela—A Man or a Masquerade

Fela Anikulapo Kuti (1938–1997) has been described by Randall F. Grass as “Africa’s most controversial, most challenging and most charismatic popular music performer”.<sup>6</sup> And to Christopher Waterman he is a “musician composer, and band leader, ideological bricoleur, political gadfly, child of colonialism, father of Afrobeat aka “he who holds Death in his pocket”.<sup>7</sup> Just as Bob Marley was regarded as “the first Third World superstar”, Fela ranked easily the *numero uno* in Africa in the utilisation of music as weapon against all forms of oppression. The brilliant and evocative styles of Fela depicting the perpetual perilous lives of average Africans especially Nigerians are fondly remembered to this day.

Born on 15 October 1938 in Abeokuta, Nigeria as Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome Kuti, he however changed his name to Fela Anikulapo Kuti on 13 April 1976.<sup>8</sup> From a middle-class background, his mother, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti was a feminist and active in the anti-colonial movement. His father Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome Kuti was the first president of the Nigeria Union of Teachers. Olikoye Ransome Kuti and Beko Ransome Kuti<sup>9</sup>, Fela’s brothers, were also well known in Nigeria.

As Justin Labinjoh has observed Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s biography reflects “something of the underlying nature of social reality and social processes in Nigeria.”<sup>10</sup> One of the most significant aspects of his 58 years of existence was his life-long battle against the existing social order. Though he was moved by the pervasive social consciousness in the United States in 1960s, he was able to transfer and localise the politics of revolution geared towards the advancement of the conditions of ordinary Nigerians. Music was the weapon he chose. Fela’s art and his self was formed and sharpened by series of ideologies and influences which later formed the basis of his philosophy.

## Resistance and Anti-Colonial Contents of Afrobeat

The underpinning philosophy behind Afrobeat was embedded in what Sola Olorunyomi has christened “Felasophy”—representing a broad spectrum of Fela’s ideas on African origin of (ancient) civilisation, slavery and western technology, religion, colonialism, multiple imperialism and collaborating elites.<sup>11</sup> He did not mince words in his conclusion about the western origin of African predicament and this formed the basis of outright rejection of foreign philosophies as the African panacea. He *inter alia* laments:

I am very clear in my mind that it was the transatlantic slave trade that created the basis for the Euro-American industrial revolutions and, along with colonialism caused the greatest assault on the psyche of the African personality<sup>12</sup>

Fela condemned the colonial and neo-colonial adventures of Britain and the United States. In an interview with Randall F. Grass, Fela explained reasons for his resistant and anti colonial postures:

Yes if you're in England you sing of enjoyment. You sing of love or who you're going to be with next! But my country is underdeveloped because of an alien system imposed on my people. So, there's no music for enjoyment, for love, when there's such struggle for people's existence So an artist, politically, artistically, my whole idea about my environment must be represented in the music.... music must awaken people to do their duty as citizens and act.<sup>13</sup>

Fela’s lyrics are usually in contrast with the humorous, light-hearted moralising of many other Nigerian popular musicians (such as Ebenezer Obey, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister and King Sunny Ade). While he mostly expressed his rejection of Western values and ideas in many media and public commentaries, his songs contain almost all of his powerful messages. Songs such as “*Don’t worry about my mouth O!*” (1997), a hilarious comparison of African and European hygiene; *Confusion* (1975) which is about the legacy of colonial economies; “*Black Man’s Cry*”, “*Chop and Quench*” (Eat and Die) and “*Buy Africa Why Black Man Dey Suffer*” (1975) express Fela’s beliefs. Through the lyrics, he usually sends uncompromising and confrontational messages with naked accusations.



Fela Kuti. (Front row, third from right)

According to Fela, the supreme struggle for Africans is the battle against Western cultural imperialism. He dissipated much energy in the vilification and denigration of Christianity and Islam which he believed are turning African brains upside down. He wanted Africans to reclaim an African identity by rediscovering their traditional religions, traditional methods of healing, and indigenous life styles which he called “Blackism”, “Africanism” or “Traditionalism.”<sup>14</sup> If Fela detested foreign impostors then he combated the local oppressors till his last breath. As a ‘musical warrior’<sup>15</sup> he regarded political independence in Africa as mere replacement of white oppressors with black ones. Figures such as Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Ian Smith of Zimbabwe, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and John Vorster of South Africa were cited as examples of collaborators between foreign powers and neo-colonial/reactionary African puppets who continued with the indiscriminate exploitation of African people.

He continued to compose increasingly strident lyrics attacking multinational capitalism and national conspiracy, the adoption of European cultural values by the different sections of African

highly productive, publishing about thirty long playing records.<sup>16</sup> Records such as *Gentleman* (1973), ridiculed the gentleness of average African elite (and a picture of a baboon in a jacket on the cover); *Expensive shit* (1975), describing attempt of the police to recover drugs from his feces; *Yellow Fever* (1976), a satire about excessive use of skin lighteners by Nigerian women; *No Bread* (1975), paradoxical juxtaposition of the absolute poverty of the Lagosian night-soil bearer (*agbepo*) and the stupendous natural wealth of Africa; *Zombie* (1996), the successful album which scathingly attacked the Nigerian military, using “Zombie” as a metaphor to describe the robotic behaviour of the Nigerian soldiers; *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* (1977), an open account of police and soldiers brutality on average Nigerians; I.T.T (1979) (International Thief Thief to represent International Telecommunication giant) which is an aggressive and blatant exposition of the exploitation and corruption of multinational corporations and their national allies.

To drive home his messages, Fela was fond of using familiar images in his songs. In “*Monkey Banana*” (1976) for instance, he used Baboon and Monkey, characters to send direct warning to the Nigerian ruling class:

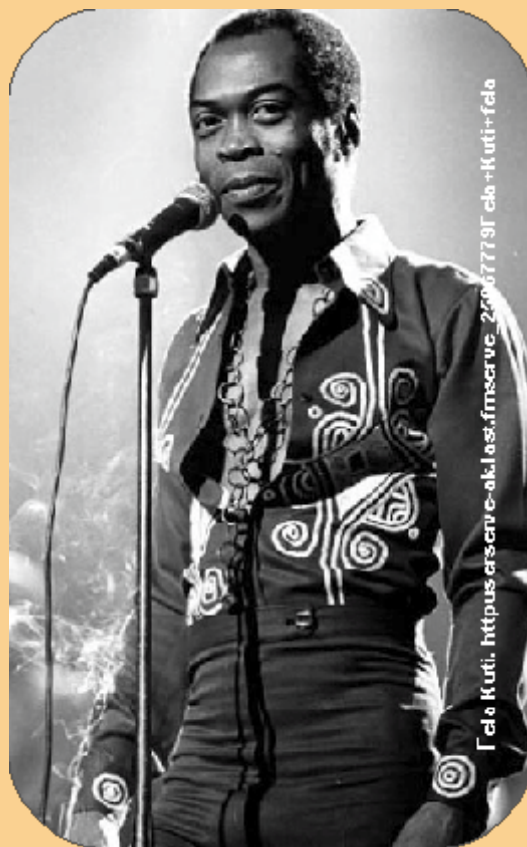
Everyday, everyday, I dey hungry  
Everyday, everyday, no house to stay  
Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop  
Baboon dey hold dem key of store  
Monkey dey cry, baboon dey laugh  
One day monkey eye come open now<sup>17</sup>

The pathetic picture of Lagos<sup>18</sup> representing the height of Nigerian urban absolute disorderliness, was adequately captured by Fela in songs such as “*Go Slow*” and “*Upside Down*” (1976). He captured the problems of urban chaos; overcrowding, acute shortage of water, erratic power supply, nauseating traffic situations, lack of sewers and proliferation of small arms as a result of the Biafran war which naturally led to upsurge in crimes especially armed robberies. These recordings, according to Waterman established Fela’s reputation as an unrepentant and a trenchant social critic and earned him the lasting enmity of the Nigerian establishments—the police, armed forces and politicians.<sup>19</sup>

Fela was a non-conformist and open sworn enemy of the Nigerian state. Successive regimes left no one in doubt in their resolution to discredit him at any available opportunity. On countless occasions, he suffered atrocious physical and psychological assaults in the hands of Nigerian authorities. From 23 November 1974 (the beginning of his travels) to 2 August 1997 (the day he passed away) he was in and out of prisons, and was involved in court proceedings and issues with the police for umpteen number of times. But in spite of state brutality (which resulted in the death of his mother on 13 April 1978), he remained absolutely resolute in his campaigns against violence and oppression. The lyrics also contained suggestions on what should be done to rescue Africa from its critical state.

### Fela’s Ways Forward for Africa

Though Fela attempted to create a new society through Afrobeat’s lyrics and performances, he also took some pragmatic steps to actualise his dreams. He set up a commune called “Kalakuta Republic”<sup>20</sup> situated in a down town slum in Lagos. As a model for revivalism of African communalism, Kalakuta Republic harboured members from his household, his bands, and usually provided the needed succor for the mass unemployed youths, school drop-outs as most of them



got allowances and jobs. In reality, Fela succeeded in establishing a kind of traditional village in the middle of the city with him as chief, head of a polygamous household<sup>21</sup>. The government in Nigeria viewed it differently and finally brought it down on 30 October 1978.<sup>22</sup>

Afrobeat lyrics also reflect his constant and consistent commitment to popular action against what he called criminality, roguery and robbery of the nation by the vagabonds in power (VIP). The lyrics were those of hope instead of hopelessness. For instance in *Army Arrangement* (1981) he believed that:

One day go be one day  
One day go be one day  
For those wey dey steal –i money  
For Africa government  
One day go be one day

A day of reckoning is coming  
A day of reckoning is coming  
For those plundering Africa's  
Government resources  
A day of reckoning is coming

Further he recommends in *Original Sufferhead* (1981) that:

Before we all are to jefa head o  
We must be ready to fight  
For am o  
Suffer head must stop.

Before we can attain a life  
Of comfort,  
We must prepare to fight for it  
The status of being the  
Victim must stop

Fela however lamented the peculiar timidity among Nigerians. In *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* (1977) though in his characteristic manner, Fela condemned the government's constant trampling on peoples' fundamental human rights with absolute impunity; he also chastised the people for their inability to confront the agents of oppression and suppression. In many of his lamentations, Fela submitted that: They (Nigerians) won't confront soldiers, police who incessantly "wipe their yansh (bottom) at will. This probably because "they are afraid to die" "they want to enjoy more life "they wan build houses or they don build houses; mama, pinkin (children) wives de for house. They usually scatter on sighting soldiers or the police.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

Afrobeat's irresistible rhythms and instrumental composition were laid with original lyrics that constantly carried provocative messages against Africa's power-hungry politics and often irresponsible leadership. Sometimes based on predictions and sooth saying; these messages overtly present hope and tools for the emancipation of Africans from colonial marauders and local oppressors. Most importantly, Fela through his music became the voice for the largely unrepresented Nigerian impoverished mass that has been socially weakened to speak against their oppressors. 'Indeed, Fela throughout his 58 years of existence used his music as weapon and medium to speak on political issues that bothered on foreign re-intervention, internal and external economic, political, cultural and psychological oppression and the ultimate need for general upliftment of the people.

However, in spite of the laudable attainments, not all writers and music followers see Afrobeat from positive angle. Shobowale (1997) for instance posited that "Afrobeat is sacrilegious, amoral and shocking. He also sees Fela as a monster of profanity lashing out against the ruling class and the oppressors.<sup>24</sup>

In his own criticism, Randall Grass pointed out the authoritarian leadership style of Fela despite

his rebellious nature and life-long battles against aggressive and authoritarian regimes in Nigeria. In fact, members of the household (Kalakuta Republic) constantly experienced irregular fines and corporal punishment as rewards for their transgressions.<sup>25</sup> With these obvious contradictions, one may be in doubt about the general popularity and acceptability of Afrobeat among Nigerians. But the fact that Afrobeat is now one of the most nationally and internationally relevant popular music that have come out of Africa shows that private morality cannot rubbish the public relevance of this iconoclastic genre.

The feat achieved by Afrobeat lies in its successful penetration of differing cultures; rooting and attaching itself into the needs and imaginations of various listeners. This became evident in diverse audience of Afrobeat which included the Nigerian intelligentsia, the street-smart youths of Lagos, hordes of urban working class, people in Europe and the U.S., a concentration of black nationalists and white college students. Indeed according to Christopher A. Waterman, Afrobeat is a subset of same uneasy coalition that fuelled the rise of reggae music in 1970s.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, several aspects of the “Abami Eda” (Mysterious One) were as controversial as they were enigmatic. He was certainly a product of an absolutely decadent system; who lived entirely to fight the pervasive evils in his society.

Therefore the greatest strength of Afrobeat remains in its ability to keep speaking in a largely passive and de-conscious Nigerian society. Afrobeat together with Fela’s charismatic aura and talent for hurling ‘yabis’ (verbal abuse) at the succession of corrupt regimes which have been trampling on people’s fundamental human rights and, through incompetence and in collusion (with the West) destroyed Africa’s largest economy. But laudable as these efforts were, Nigeria particularly and sub-Saharan Africa generally still awaits that glorious day when such everyday resistance and anti-colonial sentiments will translate into what Fela called second independence.<sup>27</sup>

- 1 See *Dictionary of Quotations*, Geddes and Grosset, Glasgow, 2001, p. 201.
- 2 This is quoted from one of Fela’s most popular songs titled ‘Original Suffer head’ released in 1981.
- 3 See Johannes Fabian, “Popular Culture in African, Findings and Conjectures” in Karin Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1997, p. 18.
- 4 See Amissah M., *Music in the Culture of Cross River State*, Adeyemo Press Ltd, Ijebu Ode, 1986, p. 10.
- 5 Johnson Adeniyi, “African Music As a tool of Social Change; A Case Study of Fela Anikulapo’s Afrobeat”, unpublished B.A. project, Creative Arts Department, University of Lagos, 2001.
- 6 See Randall F. Grass, “Fela Anikulapo Kuti: The Art of an Afrobeat Rebel” in *The Drama Review*, vol. 30, No 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 131–148.
- 7 See Christopher A. Waterman, “Chop and Quench” in *African Arts*, Vol.31, No.1, (Winter 1998), pp.1–9.
- 8 This change of name marked the beginning of several actions taken by Fela as a protest against both the pervasive colonial infiltration on African culture and the most aggressive internal aggression which was epitomised by the military rule in Nigeria.
- 9 Tejumola Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music! Fela and his Rebel Art and Politics*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2002, p. 5.
- 10 Justin Labinjoh, “Fela Anikulapo Kuti: Protest Music and Social Processes in Nigeria”, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 13, No 1, (September 1982), pp. 119–134.
- 11 Michael E. Veal, *Fela: The Life and Times of an African Musical Icon*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 10.
- 12 Sola Olorunyomi, *Afrobeat! Fela and the Imagined Continent*, IFRA, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2005, pp. 34–41.
- 13 Grass, “Fela Anikulapo Kuti”, p.10.
- 14 Chido Nwangwu, “Fela Life and times of the controversial Afrobeat Star” in *The USAfrica*, 4 August, 1997.
- 15 This appellation was given to Fela by John Covings, a music scholar at the University of Ghana, Legon in 1998.
- 16 Nwangwu “Fela Life and times”, p. 7.

- 18 Grass, “Fela Anikulapo Kuti”, p. 8.  
 19 Waterman, “Chop and Quench”, pp. 1–9.  
 20 Kalakuta Republic was named after Calcutta (now Kolkata) in India (a city having a considerable urban poor population). The commune was meant to be a micro non-African village.  
 21 Further to his resistance to colonial mentality, Fela advocated tirelessly for polygamy which he demonstrated by marrying twenty-seven females of his band in 1977.  
 22 Therese Nweke, “Knowing Fela” in *The Guardian*, 9 August 1997.  
 23 Alabi Waheed, “History of Afrobeat” in *The Guardian*, August 1997, p. 25.  
 24 Shobowale Alade, “Fela and his Music” in *The Guardian*, 2000, p. 9.  
 25 Grass, “Fela Anikulapo Kuti”, p. 42.  
 26 Waterman, “Chop and Quench”, pp.1–9.  
 27 It was part of the Manifesto of Fela’s political movement. As a pragmatic step to actualise his dreams of a new Nigeria, he formed a political party the Movement of the People (MOP) which was not registered in 1979. MOP Manifesto contains *inter-alia*:

Such is the battle of MOP  
 So is the ideology  
 Of the struggle for our  
 SECOND INDEPENDENCE

### Selected Discography

Why Black Man Dey Suffer	1971
Gentleman	1973
Alagbon Close	1974
Noise for Vendor Month	1975
Confusion	1975
Everything Scatter	1975
Expensive Shit	1975
No Bread	1976
Upside Down	1976
Before I jump like monkey give me Banana	1976
Zombie	1976
Yellow Fever	1976
Johnny Just Drop (J.J.D)	1977
I go shout plenty	1977
Sorrow, tears and blood	1977
Shuffling and smiling	1978
Unknown soldier	1979
I.T.T (International Thief Thief)	1979
Authority stealing	1980
Black president	1981
Original sufferhead	1981
Army arrangement	1985
Beasts of No Nation	1989





Special Issue

*April 2013*

**Everyday**  
**Global** *in the* **South**

Latin America: Body, Memory and Cyberspace

Adrián O. Scribano  
Victoria D' hers

## Latin America: Body, Memory and Cyberspace

Parting from existing studies on memory, body politics and cyberspace, this paper describes some ways in which these factors are shaped on the web, configuring political institutions, knowledge, and collective-action. Revising the state of the art, along with some diverse methodological proposals, a conceptual map on the links between body, memory, emotions and cyberspace is presented in this paper. Finally, a possible agenda for Latin American social sciences is delineated, making a statement on the need of 'emotional memory' approximations.



Adrián O. Scribano

Adrian Scribano is Director of the Latinamerican Journal of Studies on Bodies, Emotions and Society ([relaces.com.ar](http://relaces.com.ar)). He completed his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Buenos Aires. Adrian is also associated with the Study Group on Sociology of Emotions and Bodies, in the Gino Germani Investigation Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, URL: <http://cuerposyemociones.com.ar>, and "Research Program on Collective Action and Social Conflict" ([accioncolectiva.com.ar](http://accioncolectiva.com.ar)). Email: [adrianscribano@gmail.com](mailto:adrianscribano@gmail.com)



Victoria D'hers

Victoria D'hers completed her Ph.D. in Social Sciences from the University of Buenos Aires. She teaches Sociology at University of Buenos Aires (UBA) since 2004. She has a postdoctoral position at CONICET (National Commission for Research and Technology). Email: [victoriadhers@gmail.com](mailto:victoriadhers@gmail.com)

## Introduction

One morning I witnessed the following scene: Two computers away from where I was sitting, there was a young woman, talking on Skype loudly; I could clearly hear her words. Although I tried to ignore her, the seduction of participating in a stranger's personal communication was more powerful than my intention to maintain a 'politically correct' attitude. Moreover, I connected with the subject of the conversation: the young woman was talking to a friend, trying to convince her that what she (the woman at the cyber-café) was doing was right. It took me a few minutes to realise what she was talking about. Our young woman had yet not told her mother that some medical tests had confirmed that she is dying.

Immediately I thought of how important it is to consider the Internet as a vehicle to communicate perhaps the most complex experience of humanity: death. Not by letter, or phone or face-to-face exchange; it was via cyberspace that this young woman was expressing her affections, making use of the unspoken acknowledgment between speakers using 'social memory' turned into flesh. Cyberspace is undoubtedly modifying social practices in Latin America.

Official statistics and private companies' surveys agree that the Internet is a growing phenomenon. In numbers, this becomes clear: with a population of 579,092,570 (8.4 per cent of the world's population), Internet users in the continent ascended to 212,401,030, i.e., 10.1 per cent of world users. This results in a penetration of 36.7 per cent, whereas the penetration of the rest of the world is 29.9 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

Two research reports sustain its growing importance. The first states: 'LA is located at the global average Internet penetration; 85,040,000 users, which represents 15.35 per cent of the whole population. The region has experienced significant growth over the past six years, presently amounting to 433 per cent.'<sup>2</sup> The other report confirms that in June 2006 there were 10,320,000 users, which represents 28 per cent of the country's population.<sup>3</sup>

Dussel and Quevedo argue that as a regional tendency, Internet access has grown significantly in the last ten years.<sup>4</sup> The average access is of 28.8 per cent of the population, with important differences between countries. Magela Cabrera Arias from Panama has stressed the importance of the Internet, and ICTs in general, to enhance the connections between digital culture and urban governance.<sup>5</sup> Gender studies is not an exception in inquiring the presence and use of the Internet. As María Esther Mogollón from Peru claims: 'What is set up here are the challenges of cutting off the trends in using Internet as an inequality-deepening tool and reinforcing traditional women's roles.'<sup>6</sup> The interaction between social movements and the Internet has also grown. In 'Communication and Social Movements', Leon, Burch and Tamayo G. write with reference to Ecuador: "This capacity for interaction, typical of the Internet, (is) allowing both to (sic.) access and disseminate messages around the world, 'bypassing' the established media, as well as to 'produce' levels of coordination and agglutination above the geographic distance".<sup>7</sup>

One can observe the ways political institutions, knowledge, gender, and collective action are affected by this; simultaneously, it is also important to consider the social practices that this use implies, resulting, as they occasionally do, in changes in the body politic.<sup>8</sup> On another level, the preservation of social and collective memory, the work of human rights agencies, are increasingly being by social scientists in the regions



http://www.youthkiawaz.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/social-media-revolution

'Memory policies' and 'culture of memory' are two topics recurrently discussed in contemporary research. Torture, murder and the *desaparecidos* are some of the subjects in these studies. The accountability for the relationship between memory, resistance and identity in Latin America is another concern. Memory is observed and reconstructed by the connections between testimony and identity. As Gatti points out: 'The testimony is, therefore, the tension between the facts and their representations where the latter is impossible. Therefore, the testimony is not the problem of fidelity to fact or truth, but the absence of the word'.<sup>9</sup>

The world is a battlefield that confronts both bodies and memories. Absence is a constant that claims multiple presences of bodies. Bodies carry the marks of memory and identity. 'Identity' (political and social) is a *practice* that has been exercised in this sense, since the time of dictatorships.<sup>10</sup> A question arises: How are crossings between body, memory and cyberspace discussed today in Latin American social sciences? This paper describes the studies examining the links between memory, body politics and cyberspace in Latin America, to raise the issue of the importance of these links in the constitution of sensibilities. The methodological strategy<sup>11</sup> is: 1) a description of the information posted on the Internet about body, memory and cyberspace, 2) depictions of theoretical and methodological differences, and 3) the development of an agenda on the subject.

## Body, Memory and Cyberspace in Latin American Social Sciences

### 1) Some Conceptual Approaches

Since the 1980s, Goffman, Bourdieu, Le Breton, Turner, and others have explored the relations between memory, body, and virtuality. In this connection, Narvaez claims: 'I will argue, first, for an approach to collective memory that links up bodily schemata, to mental schemata, to social frameworks. And second, I will argue that this perspective can give us a distinctive understanding on how social groups relate to time'.<sup>12</sup> Relations between embodiment, memory and time-space narration are political issues in the 'global age', Halas argues.<sup>13</sup> Then, beyond the diverse conceptualisations, body, memory, and emotions are experiences that intersect and interlock with each other. Social sensibility is a complex and spiraling process in which several crossings between emotions and knowledge take place. Social, individual and cultural memory become reality by what is referred to as *embodiment*.

Social knowledge and social memory are two parts of the same process. Memory is a form of recovering the accumulation of social knowledge. Also, everyday knowledge is the path through which the relationship between past, present and future becomes *current*. Cyberspace emerges as a contradiction: It is a place to preserve memory and at the same time it is a fluid non-location where everything is present. It is both an opportunity to construct bodies and an occasion to occlude them.

### 2) Internet, Body and Memory

Studies on memory, body and the Internet can be categorised from two perspectives: A) by explaining what has been written on each of these topics, and B) by trying to show the connections between them.

From the first perspective, an outline of the work devoted to the discussed topics can be summarised as follows:

A) Internet: This kind of work that intends to describe or analyse the situation and/or the use of the Internet in terms of hegemonic, critical, and alternative.

B) Body: As part of the various investigations where body, embodiment and emotions are built as a 'subject' of inquiry, it is possible to make the following systematisation: 1) body as a center for building and sustaining institutional reproduction (education, public health, work); 2) the body as a *locus* of social conflict, domination and rebellion (sexualities, social movements, exclusion, violence); 3) the body-as-primary-territory of the 'colonising' practices of the social (body care, fashion, surgeries).

C) Memory: Studies on individual, social and collective memory are longstanding in Latin America. These include studies which examine the connections between democracy and dictatorship, the restitution of the relations between history, ethnicity and class, the importance of linking education, youth and cyberspace, the body as a privileged area for memory, and the preservation of cultures and cultural heritages.

### 3) Connecting Cyberspace, Body and Memory

From the other perspective outlined above, it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the studies that engage the connections between memory, body and cyberspace as follows:

#### a) Issues and Researches

There are a number of studies that emphasise the possible crossings between emotions, body, memory, and cyberspace. We will mention here only a few that support this article's intention.

In 'Gender and Sexuality in Virtual Communities', Gomez Cruz explains how computer-mediated communication is an opportunity to define and observe cyberspace as a hybrid stage, as a place to install an 'obsenario',<sup>14</sup> and where the works of mimesis are present.<sup>15</sup> In 'Rituals of Simulation and Virtual Sociability', Mora Castañeda analyses system interface situations as contexts where language-games, ritual and simulation connect bodies, memories, and emotions.<sup>16</sup> Balaguer Prestes takes up the much-elaborated concepts of '*hipercuerpo*' and '*metahombre*' to point out the connections between fantasy and reality, and cyberspace as a moment for the return of what has been repressed.<sup>17</sup> Of a different opinion is Oliveira Justiça, who reflects on the 'place' of the body in online communication, and claims that the 'apparent' absence of the body causes an expression of tolerance, opposite to the 'difference' of bodies.<sup>18</sup> She sees in the 'annulment of the body' a space that further creates fictitious and multiple bodies. It is necessary to mention the studies of Del Brutto about identities and ICTs and emotions on the Internet.<sup>19</sup>

Most recently, Antonio Casilli has discussed whether the internet promotes a 'technological disembodiment' as alleged. He examines the instances where HIV /AIDS was regarded as a 'virus' and how it was linked to internet activism in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> Mexican Sánchez Martínez reflects on the relations between body and technology, posing that 'virtuality has the faculty to disrupt the person's body for creating communication'.<sup>21</sup> In a study of identities, Muros discusses how 'virtual identity' is configured, questioning its reality and its relations to the imaginary.<sup>22</sup> Turpo Gebera also questions how the Internet contributes to the construction of virtual identity, centered on communication and the imaginary but concerned also with anonymity, 'sustraction' and 'anamorphosis', and particular social spaces.<sup>23</sup> From a communicational point of view, García Jiménez *et al* argue that the concept of border is challenged from the extended use of the Internet, generating new ideas about memory, nationality and community, thus presenting a typology of virtual boundaries.<sup>24</sup>

Etchevers Goijberg's article 'Where are the emotions in Cyberspace? Analysis of the current situation', is an excellent example of how different traditions and research programs converge on the inquiry about connections between knowledge, communication, and emotions.<sup>25</sup>

Although they have different emphases, it is worth mentioning that the studies by Gómez Cruz, Santos and Paveloski, include the search for valid knowledge construction processes about Virtual Communities, a reflection about technology's place as 'soul of societies', and transformations (and contributions) in the theory of communication to investigate social practices on the Internet. They clearly show how social knowledge depends on the way bodies and emotions are in a way updated in the



virtuality of cyberspace.<sup>26</sup>

**b) Body, Emotions, and Memory: Consequences of Crossings and Connections**

From this picture, the analysis of Latin American research on body, emotions, and memory on the Internet allows us to reach some conclusions. We may summarise the themes that have appeared in this context, thus:

- 1) the revisions on cyber-culture intertwined with ‘post-human’ forms of presentation of bodies and virtual memory;
- 2) the work pointing to the ‘uses’ of the Internet in relation to the emergence of new *subjectivities*;
- 3) the essays that link memory, resistance and collective action through the Internet.

Be it *hipocuerpo* or *hipercuerpo* - collective knowledge or network knowledge - the current ways of interrogating the connections between body, memory, and emotions on (and through) the Internet challenge the implementation of conventional research strategies. This allows a recognition of the changes that are being caused by media technologies.

**Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

The theoretical and methodological perspectives in studies on body, memory, and cyberspace are varied and sometimes completely divergent. Research strategies reflect the variety of issues described above: Some studies are qualitative, others are quantitative, and some others both qualitative and quantitative inputs. Some have used the link between surveys and focus groups and Bakhtin’s semiotics to understand the relationship between subjectivity and writing,<sup>27</sup> case studies of collective experiences in Argentina<sup>28</sup> and so on. From a theoretical perspective, there are studies that give an account of the current and potential connections between studies on the Net and others disciplines. One example is that of Arturo Escobar’s work, a kind of cyber-anthropology that deals with the themes of the body, emotions, and memory.<sup>29</sup> There are also specific references to practices, such as the research work by Gomez Cruz, reworking Turkle’s ideas regarding *depaysement*.<sup>30</sup> Sandoval Forero proposes a virtual ethnography in the context of new relationships that imply the consideration of this ‘cibersocioanthropology’ as a new disciplinary approach.<sup>31</sup>

Theoretical and methodological researches that connect body, memory and cyberspace can be summarised as follows.

1. We can see a multi-paradigmatic situation where various cultures of inquiry are expressed (*sensu* Hall).<sup>32</sup>
2. It is possible to verify the use of different methodological strategies and technical resources.
3. Studies on body, memory and cyberspace are mostly multi-disciplinary.

Having reviewed the current research, it is now possible to suggest a possible agenda for this field of study.



## Possible Agenda for Latin America

### Body, Bodies and Social Constructions of 'Emotional Memory'

Human beings learn - primarily and fundamentally - through the body, which implies a permanent but contingent crossing between perceptions, sensations, and emotions. The ways to construct, distribute, and reproduce this knowledge operate from individual memories (as a subject), social memories (as a subject belonging to a class), and collective memories (as a subject belonging to a class with particular identities). These uncertain, plural and undetermined memories embody and transform through mechanisms of the social. The ways to produce, store, distribute and reproduce social knowledge directly affect the connections between memory, emotions, and the body; the last three are the *loci* and space where these connections are made.

To reconstruct perceptions of the body implies at least two intertwined paths: A) crossings and ruptures between *body-individual*, *body-subjective* and *body-social*; and B) articulations and connections between body-image, skin, and movement.

A) The first path lies in visiting the distances and entanglements between body-individual, body-social and body-subjective, as we have previously analysed in other articles.<sup>33</sup> This entails underlining the connections between the experience of the body as organism, the experience of the body as a reflective act, and the practice of the body as a social construction. A *body-individual* refers to phylogenetic logic, to the articulation between the organic and the environment; a *body-subjective* takes off from self-reflection, in the sense of the 'I' as a gravity center through which multiple subjectivities are formed; and finally, a *social body* is the social made flesh, as it were (*sensu* Bourdieu).

These three basic body practices organise and are organised by logics of regulation of the senses. Gradual progress and constant metamorphosis of sensitivities are ways of appropriating the body's energy, the connections between diverse body-sensations; taken together, this is one of the pillars of domination and also of autonomy.

This kind of ontological re-description demands a discussion on the differences between body and social energies; but this cannot be discussed here. To maintain the 'state of things' assigned as *body individual*, it is essential that the body-energy becomes an object of both production and consumption. Social energy that is presented through the social body is based on body energy. The power to plan, carry out, and resolve the consequences of the actions of agents is what constitutes social energy.

B) The second possible path is to draw and reconstruct what we know about the body in relation to the methods of getting to know it, that is, as *body-image*, *body-skin* and *body-movement*.<sup>34</sup> These three ways of inscribing the corporal in a narrative make a reconstructive analysis of how we can see the corporal from its impacts on sociability, sensibility, and experiences of everyday life as social phenomena.

At first, *body-image* is an indicator of the process of 'I see they see me'; *body-skin* indicates the process of how one 'naturally-feels' the world; and *body-movement* is the inscription on the body in a field of possible actions. These three ways to reconstruct body experiences may be seen as paths for the analyses and interpretations of how body forms appear socially. Tension and process between social parts of the body, the body *there*, and posture, as a significant social structure, elaborate the textuality of the body-image that every agent must build and administrate.

The senses appear to be natural, but they are also results of a social process. It is in this process of social construction that the *body-skin* is built. Consequently, sociability and social sensibilities get entrenched as the 'natural' way to 'feel the world'.

*Body-movement* is a mediation of both the power and impotence of body and social energies. There are ways bodies can act, which is to say that they *are able to* act depending on social energies and social inertia. In other words, there are certain ways of action that embody the social geometries of displacement as well as social inertia. In this process, seeing, smelling, touching, hearing, and tasting coalesce into a possible sociability, indicating social devices for the regulation of sensations.

This theoretical observation tentatively makes visible the place of body politics in social

structure. It underscores the necessity and urgency of looking through the relations between body, memory and emotions in Latin America, starting from the transformations provoked by the extension and use of the Internet.

### **Towards a Possible Agenda of Discussion**

It is not easy to draw an agenda for research on relations between bodies, emotions, and memory in cyberspace in Latin America; this is because there are vast economic and cultural differences between countries. Nevertheless, it is possible to point out a few academic challenges and provocations.

#### **Social Research and Internet as ‘Ethno-space’**

First of all, it is very important to emphasise the place and role of researches of the internet in this time of rapid transformations. The increase in Internet users is a great opportunity for research on the transformation of bodies and emotions in this ‘ethno-space’.

#### **Uncertainty and Poverty**

One of the features of neo-colonial capitalism is the consolidation of contradictions and the correlations between an instantaneous market, uncertainty, regional insecurity and poverty. It is an interesting challenge to explore how this contradiction takes place in cyberspace and how it is employed as a form of expression by the popular classes.

#### **Cyberspace and Emotions**

Cyber-café, community centres and other collective forms of access and connection are places where laughter, entertainment, enjoyment, and pleasure emerge. These are privileged ‘observation units’ to grasp changes in social manners.

#### **Social and Cyber Bodies**

Hundreds of blogs and photoblogs are being created continuously. The word, the image and the sound are being put at the service of representation; social cooperation and political militancy through the internet is a ubiquitous contemporary phenomenon. These old bodies in new contexts are avenues for new research.

#### **Classes and Technology**

The upper classes in Latin America are very familiar with technologies of information and communication. This opens a horizon for studying how these technologies enable a new way of building body extensions.

Social and collective memory is a particularly important issue for Latin American people and scientists. Both the dominant and subaltern classes use cyberspace to express everyday antagonisms between bodies and emotions. In this context, different forms and cultures of memory are being formed and in urgent need of investigation.

- 1 Statistics updated on 30 June 2011. URL: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats10.htm>. Also see URL: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats10.htm#spanish> for statistics divided per country, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 2 Datanalisis 2007.
- 3 Diario Clarín (ed.), *Internet en la Argentina*, Clarín Global-Eldasa SA, Buenos Aires, 2006.
- 4 I. Dussel & L.A. Quevedo, *Educación y nuevas tecnologías: los desafíos pedagógicos ante el mundo digital*, Editorial Santillana, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 18.
- 5 M. Cabrera Arias, “Cultura digital y gobernabilidad urbana. Algunas reflexiones”, *Tareas*, 12, 2005. URL: <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/panama/cela/tareas/tar121/castro.rtf>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 6 M. E. Mogollón, “Mujeres y TIC en el Perú: Brechas y Desafíos”, *Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer*, Caracas 9, 22, Jan-June 2004, p. 165.
- 7 O. León, S. Burch and G.E. Tamayo, *Movimientos Sociales y Comunicación*. Agencia Latinoamericana de Información, ALAI, Quito, 2005, p. 12.



- 8 We define body politics as the strategies accepted by a society to manage the individuals' social availability which are linked with and 'are made stronger' by emotional politics tending to regulate the ways of constructing social sensitivities, both being a fundamental part of the mechanisms of power structuring.
- 9 G. Gatti, "De la experiencia del 'vacío social'. Lo inenarrable, lo social invisible y la excepción absoluta en la construcción de la figura del desaparecido. Algunos apuntes teóricos", *Reunión 2004*, 7-9 October 2004, p. 12.
- 10 As Horen and Rivarola state about women detained by the last dictatorship in Argentina: 'Identity construction results from their own values and attitudes of political militancy, as well as values and attitudes that non-militants brought into the situation. As contradictory as that may seem, it was coexistence, the everyday companionship what helped overcome differences'. See B. Horen and M.B. Rivarola, "Cuerpos: Poder y Resistencia. Las detenidas políticas de la cárcel de Villa Devoto", *Período 1974 – 1983*, 2007, p. 6.
- 11 This paper was prepared following a thorough revision of three very important sources of information in Latin American social sciences: Redalyc, <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/>; SciELO, <http://www.scielo.org>; and the virtual library CLACSO, <http://www.biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 12 And continues: "On the one hand, it can help us understand how collective pasts sediment in individual and 'collective bodies', so that the past becomes vivified in shared presents; and social groups hence 'naturally', 'intuitively' march toward inherited futures. But on the other hand, I will also argue that an embodied perspective can help us understand how social actors detach themselves from what the past prescribes for their bodies (e.g. the value of pre-marital virginity), and hence bring to life new practices, new standards, and new futures". See R. Narváz, "Embodiment, Collective Memory and Time", *Body & Society*, 12, 3, 2006, p. 52.
- 13 However, without questioning the importance of that dimension of change, the problem of social time in the processes of globalisation must be somehow tackled differently through more relevant processes than the noticeable weakening of the importance of chronology and evanescence of undifferentiated temporality, especially in media communication, or even in the particular timelessness of multimedia's hypertext. See E. Halas, "Social Memory and the Global Age", *Time & Society*, 17, 1, 2008, p. 104.
- 14 The words 'Obscenario', 'Hipocuerpo', 'Hiper cuerpo' and 'Meta-hombre' are not Spanish words themselves, but may be understood as: Obscenario resulting from the merging of *obsceno* (obscene) and *escenario* (scenery); Hipocuerpo and Hiper cuerpo merge the *hipo* (under, low) or *hiper* (much, excess) and *cuerpo* (body); *Meta-hombre* mixing *meta* (along with, after) and *hombre* (man).
- 15 E. Gómez Cruz, 'Género y Sexualidad en las Comunidades Virtuales'. Original Source: III Biental de Comunicación, November 2001, Puebla, México. ARCHIVO del Observatorio para la CiberSociedad. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=20>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 16 B. Mora Castañeda, "Rituales de simulación y sociabilidad virtual. Una aproximación a los procesos de construcción de emociones en la Red", *TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 2, 2003, URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=31>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 17 R. Balaguer Prestes, "El hipocuerpo: Una vivencia actual que la virtualidad aún no puede eludir", *TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 2, 2002. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=9> Viewed 5 November 2011. And when referring to 'online love' as a *refuge*, offers a very interesting approach to what can be understood and expected from the emotions and bodies on the Net. See R. Balaguer Prestes, 'Amor online: refugios, resistencias e inicios posmodernos', *TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 7, 2005, URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=76> Viewed 5 November 2011.
- 18 P. Oliveira Justiça, "A ausência do Corpo na Comunicação On-line", ARCHIVO del Observatorio para la CiberSociedad, 2005, URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=31>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 19 B.A. Del Brutto, "Globalización, Tecnologías de la Información y Nuevas Identidades", Source: *Encuentro de investigadores en temáticas urbanas. Lo urbano en el pensamiento social*, 29 y 30 de septiembre de 2000. Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, UBA. ARCHIVO del Observatorio para la CiberSociedad. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/archivo/articulo.php?art=14>, viewed 20 October 2011; B.A. Del Brutto, "Lenguajes, Identidades, Tecnologías", ARCHIVO del Observatorio para la CiberSociedad, 2000. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/archivo/articulo.php?art=15>, viewed 20 October 2011. This author has also revised the inequality implications of the 'Sociedad del Conocimiento' (Knowledge Society) resulting from cybernetic research. See B.A. Del Brutto, "Sociedades del Conocimiento en los escenarios latinoamericanos, contradicciones y desigualdades", *Revista TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 10, 2007. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=89>, viewed 21 October 2011.
- 20 A. Casilli, "A History of Virulence: The Body and Computer Culture in the 1980s", *Body & Society*, 16, 1, 2010. URL: <http://bod.sagepub.com/content/16/4/1>, viewed 7 October 2011.
- 21 J.A. Sánchez Martínez, "Cuerpo y tecnología. La virtualidad como espacio de acción contemporánea", *Argumentos*, 23, 62, enero-abril 2010, pp. 227-244.

- 22 B. Muros, “El concepto de identidad en el mundo virtual: el yo online”, *Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 14, 2, pp. 49-56, 2011. URL: <http://www.redalyc.org/src/inicio/ArtPdfRed.jsp?iCve=217019031004>, viewed 6 November 2011.
- 23 O. Turpo Gebera, “Socio-dinámica de las identidades en la red”, *Razón y Palabra*, 73, agosto-octubre 2010. URL: <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/src/inicio/ArtPdfRed.jsp?iCve=199514908021>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 24 A. García Jiménez; Beltrán Orenes, P; Núñez Puente, S, “Una aproximación al concepto de frontera virtual. Identidades y espacios de comunicación”, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 65, 2010, pp. 214-221.
- 25 N. Etchevers Goijberg, “Dónde están las emociones en el Ciberespacio? Análisis de la situación actual”, *TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 5, 2005. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=71>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 26 E. Gómez Cruz, “Espacio, Ciberespacio e Hiperespacio: Nuevas configuraciones para leer la Comunicación Mediada por Computadora”, Original Source: Anuario de Investigación del CONEICC, *ARCHIVO del Observatorio para la CiberSociedad*, 2002. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/archivo/articulo.php?art=19>, viewed 5 November 2011; T.C. Santos, “O Ciberespaço: Dimensão antropológica das sociedades de controle”, *TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 6, 2005. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=44>, viewed 5 November 2011; A. Paveloski, “Subsidios para uma teoria da Comunicação digital”, *TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad*, 4, 2004. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/textos/articulo.php?art=43>, viewed 21 October 2011.
- 27 M. T. de A. Freitas, “Sites construídos por adolescentes: novos espaços de leitura/escrita e subjetivação”, *Cad. CEDES*, ene./abr. 25, 65, 2005, pp. 87-101.
- 28 S. Finquelevich, “Las cooperativas de telecomunicaciones y la democratización social. Telpin, un estudio de caso de organización comunitaria de la sociedad de la información”, *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 22, 2005.
- 29 A. Escobar, “Bienvenidos a Cyberia. Notas para una antropología de la cibercultura”, *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 22, 2005. URL: <http://res.uniandes.edu.co/pdf/data/rev22.pdf>, viewed 21 October 2011.
- 30 E. Gómez Cruz, “Hacia la construcción de una metodología para el estudio de las ‘Comunidades Virtuales’. Una propuesta emergente”, *ARCHIVO del Observatorio para la CiberSociedad*, 2002. URL: <http://www.cibersociedad.net/archivo/articulo.php?art=21>, viewed 5 November 2011.
- 31 E.A. Sandoval Forero, ‘Cibersocioantropología de comunidades virtuales’, *Revista Argentina de Sociología*, Año 5, 9, 2007, pp. 64-89.
- 32 J. Hall, *Cultures of Inquiry*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1999.
- 33 See A. Scribano, *Policromía Corporal. Cuerpos, Grafías y Sociedad*, CEA CONICET Universidad Nacional de Córdoba – CUSCH-Universidad de Guadalajara, 2007, p. 310; *Mapeando Interiores. Cuerpo, Conflicto y Sensaciones*, CEA—CONICET-Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, p. 214.
- 34 A. Scribano, & P. Lisdero (eds.), *Sensibilidades en juego. Miradas múltiples desde los estudios sociales de los cuerpos y las emociones*, CEA-CONICET, Córdoba, 2010, [e-book], p. 257.



Special Issue

April 2013

**Everyday**  
**Global** *in the* **South**

Living Like an Independent Filmmaker

Nilanjan Bhattacharya

## Living Like an Independent Filmmaker

The article, in a manner which is personal and fragmentary, describes the uncertainties in the life of an independent filmmaker. Largely symptomatic of the South Asian situation where there is minimal stress on the documentary form outside multinational television channels, the article illustrates the lack of space for the independent filmmaker. Where themes, funding, distribution are unsure if one is not following whatever the 'market' demands, independence is ironical. The filmmaker's anonymous journal expresses such times and anxieties.



Nilanjan Bhattacharya

Nilanjan Bhattacharya is a filmmaker and writer based in Calcutta. He works on various topics ranging from environment and related folk knowledge, indigenous food culture, conflicting cultural milieus and traditional artistic practices. He has received National Film Awards twice (2005 and 2010) for his documentaries, *Under This Sun* and *Johar Welcome To Our World* respectively. *Ninety Degrees*, *Rain in the Mirror* and *Bengalis in the World of Fish* are some of his important works.

Nilanjan has also been engaged in various artistic collaborations in art spaces. He writes on food and Calcutta's public culture. Email: [nilanjanbhatta1@gmail.com](mailto:nilanjanbhatta1@gmail.com)

## 10 December 2009, Calcutta

Finally, I have decided to stop smoking. After pondering for many days, yesterday, in the middle of the night, I took the much-awaited oath. For me, today, in many years, is the first no-cigarette day. In the last couple of years I have put up with a continuous irritation in my throat, a niggling cough that did not go even after medical treatment. ‘Disgusting,’ Preeti would yell at me! ‘Now you even have the smoker’s cough!’ She was agitated and concerned. My friend, Ashoke Banerji, an ENT specialist, checked me and said the obvious: I have to give up smoking... completely. Otherwise no medicine would help. I had seen this coming. The production of *Standing Alone* was then in full swing and I was stressed. I could not think of quitting smoking even for a day and carried on with one packet a day at least, sometimes one-and-half, the king-sized ones. Giving up smoking is easier said than done and for an independent filmmaker, I assume, it is even tougher. I had tried earlier, stopped several times, only to resume again. Once I have been without cigarette for ten days at a stretch but I failed to continue. On the eleventh day, the first thing I did in the morning was to light a cigarette! After several ineffectual attempts I decided that I won’t ‘try’ anymore, rather, I would simply ‘quit’ only when I am fully confident about not starting to smoke again. Yesterday was that day. And today, I politely but proudly announce that I am done with smoking forever.

Oh my god! What a crack of luck! I just checked my e-mail and found out that Mrinmoy from School of Cultural Studies and Artistic Practices has invited me to write an article for their journal. It is a prestigious offer and the topic suits me perfectly – everyday life of

a documentary filmmaker. I am excited; I know I can write an interesting piece by drawing on my own experiences, but how do I write? How do I now simulate the coordination between my brain, eyes, fingers and the laptop keys without the nicotine stimulus? How do I write without cigarettes?

This is the first entry from a filmmaker’s diary, a bunch of ten loose pages which I actually purchased from Gopal, a *kapadiwala*<sup>1</sup> who visits me once a month. Gopal and I share a symbiotic relationship; I sell him old newspapers, beer bottles, broken glasses and other recyclable household wastes; I buy from him old books and a variety of other things. In the previous five years I have bought an array of interesting stuff from Gopal, ranging from old books, half-torn family albums, hand-written accounts book of a middle-class Bengali housewife from the 1950s, framed needle-works on cloth, to a designer *nassir dibey*, a pot to store snuff.

The pages were of good quality – blue-ruled paper – but it seemed that someone had torn the pages from an exercise book. The beautiful fountain-pen handwriting of the writer grabbed my attention. Maintaining a handwritten diary, using fountain pen in 2009-10, the guy must have been very stylish, I thought. I did not know much about documentaries and knew even less about their makers. Curious, I started reading and immediately got hooked to that man’s simple but evocative narrative of his unpredictable everyday.

## 20 December 2009, Largumi, Jharkhand<sup>2</sup>

I am in an interior village of Jharkhand for a reconnaissance trip. Mahabir Kujur, my friend from Ranchi, is the local coordinator for my new documentary, *Hunger*. He is a local, it is his village and he



Dance moves. Pic: Author

speaks Oraon<sup>3</sup> as well as Sadri<sup>4</sup>, the most common local dialect in a large part of Jharkhand. These things come as big advantages while making a documentary.

Things in these places may not be very smooth all the time and there are definite reasons to worry; like Maoist<sup>5</sup> interference. I have been told that in the interiors of Jharkhand nothing moves without the M-L's approval. 'It is okay, you are alone this time. So it is not that problematic,' Mahabir assured me. Then came the intimidating directive from him: 'Next time, when you come with your crew and equipment, the Maoists will have to be informed beforehand. We need to tell them what is our intention, how many of us will be traveling together and the places we want to shoot in'. I became concerned and asked him right away about possibilities of extortion or any other kind of risks. 'Nothing at all. I have already spoken to the head of a local NGO, who is in good terms with the Maoists and will brief them about everything. Not to worry, they also understand what's good, what's bad for them.' Mahabir sounded cool and confident. It was reassuring. I had to ensure the safety of my team; he knows the ground realities more than me anyway.

It is difficult to write continuously in this low light. Mahabir's mother is calling us; I think dinner has been served. I am excited; she's cooked a special variety of wild mushroom that looks like small white eggs, and *phutkol saag*<sup>6</sup>. Mahabir and I collected them from the neighbouring forest earlier today.

### 24 December 2009, Calcutta

Back to good, old, polluted Calcutta. The experiences I gathered in Jharkhand, hopping from one village to another, meeting characters, and listening to narratives from the locals about their present and past. It was a captivating experience. Simultaneously, they have infused my mind with excitement and possibilities: Plenty of things to talk about and so many stories to be told. I have come to a decision: I will go all out for this film.

Next week I am going to Delhi to meet Steve Bristow. He will be in the city to attend a documentary workshop. I need to meet him and discuss the possibilities of some funding from Europe for my film. He had helped me to get a small post-production fund from TV-Estonia for my latest film, *Standing Alone*. I am hoping that this time too he will be able to generate some money, and at the pre-production stage itself. It is unfortunate that I won't be able to secure any funding from my own country. Whatever little funding for documentaries we have are not fairly distributed. So, no point expecting any funding from here.

In my film, hunger will be a powerful presence and motif. The idea is to explore the traditional food culture of the indigenous people, in different geographical zones of India. I will cover different traditional food culture of the indigenous people there. How relevant are such food cultures which are



Mahua Fruits. Pic: Author

significantly dependent on nature? Why is food insecurity so rampant in tribal societies? Will the sustainable practices of resource management be of any help in fighting food insecurity? To what extent is the widespread practice of corruption in our country responsible for such insecurity? Dealing with all these questions in one film is not easy. It may very well turn out to be a so-called 'activist film', but given my style of approaching a theme, a topic and my distinctive style of visualization, I am hoping that the mood will be entirely different. It might be too early to say, but I am looking for a film that is critical of our society, introspective and at the same

time bears a celebratory spirit of the vitality of India's indigenous cultures.

These are thoughts, scattered and preliminary. Now I need to write a concept note, an absolute necessity to woo commissioning editors and funders. I had written one earlier but after my recent recce trip, naturally I want to write a new one. Not now. Need to rush to Jaya and Prasanta's place. They are hosting a party with a few common friends. Moreover, tonight, Jaya is cooking Italian and she is a fantastic culinary expert. Also, Prasanta requested me to reach early; he wants to discuss the idea of his new film.

### 26 December 2009, Calcutta

Today was a waste. Family get-togethers are boring and, to top it, this one was at my in-laws! What do I do there? What's there to talk about with sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law — the corporate executive types? How long can I talk to Preeti's parents? I always try to avoid such get-togethers, often skip many, but cannot possibly avoid them altogether. Every year, she makes sure that I attend this end-of-the-year family get-together, which, in her opinion is the most significant event for upholding 'family spirit'; being a '*celebrity jamai*' (celebrity son-in-law), my appearance is a must. One feels nice, sometimes, to receive the 'celebrity treatment' and be the centre of attention, especially when in reality your work-life turns it to a joke. But occasionally, it can turn out to be embarrassing. I still remember my interactions with one of Preeti's distant aunts during a similar event:

Aunt: Oh, you make films! How exciting!

She was introduced to me for the first time by my father-in-law.

Me: Yes, I do.

I replied politely but was anxious at the same time. I knew what's coming next.

Aunt: Bangla Boi<sup>7</sup>? Bengali films? Which one?

Me: No, No, I do not make Bengali films.

Aunt: Oh! Then Hindi, Bollywood?

She seemed to be even more excited probably by imagining my intimate associations with super stars, the Khans and the Katrinas and shoots me a Bollywood bullet,

Aunt: Who is the hero? And the heroine?

For a moment I was dislodged by her assertive inquisitiveness and felt insecure. So to regulate that lady's fiery stream of enthusiasm I retaliated with a legitimate announcement,

Me: I neither make Bollywood nor Bangla films; I make documentaries.

The manner in which I made that announcement, I knew I had sounded rebellious. But all I had really wanted then was to stop that conversation. I knew from my experience that such declaration would instantly leave a 'film-enthusiast' like her dismayed and she would lose interest in further conversation. It had worked the way I expected. In her eyes I noticed a definite sign of disengagement, a complete lack of interest in pursuing any such filmic discourse with me. I had felt a draught of relief. But almost immediately I could hear a male voice asking me: 'Oh! The documentaries that they show on television?' It is Preeti's cousin, an information technology professional in a multinational company. I was skeptical, so I immediately asked him, 'On which channel do you see documentaries?' Astonished at my ignorance he tried to enlighten me, 'Why? On National Geographic, Discovery and also Animal Planet. They show beautiful documentaries on lions, crocodiles and birds all the time'. In avoiding one trap, I have fallen into another. 'In the family we all watch Nat Geo regularly. Especially my children, Gourav and Nina love watching animals on TV...' He continued praising the brilliance of Nat Geo documentaries, their camerawork, sceneries, sunsets and sunrises and crafty editing. Standing there, I felt the entire history of Indian documentaries disappear before me. It is not his fault to be ignorant about Indian documentaries. They are not aired on TV or commercially released at theatres; then how do people know about the films we make? Sixty-two years after independence, we do not have a documentary channel in our country nor a time slot in any of the channels dedicated to such genre. How will people know that documentaries are not only that which are shown on Nat Geo, Discovery and such channels? How do they experience documentaries that are thematically and aesthetically different from the films such channels telecast all through the day?

Oh! It is late, almost 2.30 am! Wondering what happened to this PraxisDoc Fund? They were supposed to announce the result by the first week of December but it is already 26. No news! If they give me this pre-production fund (not much though, only 10,000 USD) then I can start traveling for research. Will I get the fund or not?

### 2 January 2010, Delhi

It is bloody cold here in Delhi. Five to six degrees on an average! Can a skinny Bengali like me tolerate such cold weather (without cigarettes)? But, I will, for sure, as I have already stepped into new year as a non-smoker! Yes, the oath has been kept alive with utmost grit and tenacity and whisky, our dear friend, often plays a spiritually uplifting role in the evenings. My Lord, it is to be noted that while I continue to drink, I no more crave for a puff. Now I enjoy more, sipping such purity.

Eventually I had to fly to Delhi from Calcutta. No tickets were available for any trains, in any tier. The *tatkal* scheme also could not provide any tickets. There is a mad rush for tickets now. Return flights, the cheapest one, cost me twelve thousand rupees. An unwarranted expenditure and a cause for concern given that my bank balance is shrinking in an alarming speed. In the previous six months since *Standing Alone* has been completed, I have spent much money making DVD copies, printing posters and DVD covers, designing website and couriering the disks to festivals all over the world! I did apply for two funds for promotion and distribution of documentaries but was unsuccessful. So, no funds yet. It can soon be tricky if I do not get... No point worrying now!

### 3 January 2010, Delhi

Great! *Standing Alone* has been selected for the Belgrade Documentary Film Festival! I am so happy. I hope they will pay for my travel. In that case, next month, I am in Belgrade!

### 6 January 2010, Calcutta

Back to Cal. Showed Jim Cowdrey a selection from the footage shot during the recce trip. He quite liked it. He found Birji Oraon, the eighty-year-old man from Largumi, fascinating. Birji is not only a repository of knowledge on local food and local history, but he is also the kind of character who can steer the narrative of a film. In a way, he can be the 'hero' of *Hunger*. The way he talks, his mischievous smile, expressive fingers and above all, his sense of wit! Jim said he will talk to other commissioning editors for co-production. But for that he needs a trailer. Anyway, I must have a trailer if I want to apply for funds in the pitching fora, which means I need to plan another shoot! If I do not get the PraxisDoc fund, it means I may have to carry on swiping my credit card in the hope of securing some funding very soon.

### 7 January 2010, Calcutta

'This is a reminder regarding the article on the theme of everyday life of a documentary filmmaker that you have kindly consented to write for...'

Here is the e-mail reminder from Mrinmoy and the deadline is only five days away! I have not yet thought or written anything on the topic. What do I write? How is a documentary filmmaker's everyday? Is it different from a Writers' Building clerk or a Marwari cloth merchant from Burrabazar? So...

What could be the typical activities associated with a documentary filmmaker? What are the aesthetic questions I explore here? Possibly the following: Do documentaries necessarily mean recording the other? Does that mean that intervening in other people's lives is intrinsic to documentary filmmaking? Reflecting the reality mediated by the camera and which are powered by editing tools? I may take off from here and start talking about a documentary filmmaker's everyday.

I may take off from here and start talking about a documentary filmmaker's everyday.

# Uncertainty. Unpredictability of documentary situation.

# Irregular lifestyle.



- # Film as a recurrent motif in the filmmaker's daily life.
- # The characters' daily life spills over into the director's.
- # What is success, what is failure?
- # Introspections: Questioning the very purpose of making a documentary and its ethical issues.

Now I need to do focus and start writing meaningful sentences. And once they are written, interweave the logical threads to produce paragraphs. All sounds good and simple but I feel nervous every time I think of writing some serious stuff. Above everything I see myself sitting in front of the computer and smoking!

I also need to write a treatment note for *Hunger*, then go for a shoot, come back and edit the trailer. I can feel the pressure mounting.

Shall I take the liberty of smoking one or two cigarettes just as an aid to write the article and concept note???????

I wonder, why there were no other entries in the period of eight months? The next one is in September, eight months later! Did not he write anything in between? It might have happened that he got so busy researching, shooting and applying for funding that he did not get the time or inclination to write the journal. Or could it be that the pages which carried his everyday of those eight months are lost.

### 5 September 2010

I am back from the first round of shooting. It is an extraordinary encounter with India which is still overshadowed by the fear of hunger. Poverty is so widespread and discreet in those interior places of Jharkhand that standing there you feel ashamed of yourself.

Corruption is clearly the reason for such condition. My recent experiences in the field have led me to think so. This time on our shooting trip I experienced something shocking. One morning, while going from one location to another, we stopped at a roadside market. As everyone was waiting for tea, Mahabir and I went to make a round of the market place, a regular village market, but open and quite big in its spread. There, among many things, ranging from fresh vegetables to seeds, we saw piled up assorted rice. Why assorted rice? Because, they are collected from different government-run ration (public distribution system) shops, then mixed and sold to the public. Price? 14 rupees per kg. Who are the buyers? The locals, mainly the tribals. Isn't it illegal? Yes, it is, but who cares? What about the government directive that BPL (below poverty level) people should be given rice from the ration shops at a subsidised rate, 4 rupees per kg? Yes, the government directive says so, but when they visit the shop they were offered only two words, 'no supply'. So, they come here to buy this assorted rice.

Birji was a total flop this time! We talked to him on camera but all his spontaneity, quirky expressions and frenzied laughter were gone. He looked and sounded completely dull! May be he was shy, and was feeling bored! What to do? Such is the uncertainty of shooting a documentary. Birji disheartened us but two women from the Asur tribe in Dhori Kona gave us a gem of a sequence. Actually, it was more of an exchange between two women, than an interview. They spoke about not having enough earnings, and adequate food to feed the children, their annual migration in search of better livelihood, more food and generally mulled over how unlucky they are. The conversation assumed tremendous intensity and I can anticipate that it is going to be a key sequence in the final film.

\*\*\*

Was this the last page of his diary? I think not. But unfortunately I did not have any other pages in my possession to follow his trail or to know more about his ongoing film project. Who was this filmmaker? No pages featured his name. So many things are not clear. Was he able to write that article finally? Did

he get any funding to support his shoots or did his credit card keep him afloat? Is he still a non-smoker or has he succumbed to the pressure of being an independent filmmaker and taken to cigarettes again?

**1** Kapadiwala is a person who visits neighbourhoods with their distinct loud calls and buys old newspapers, thrown away glass bottles, broken pieces of plastic, utensils etc. Usually seen in the morning hours kapadiwalas are quite ubiquitous in the city of Kolkata and the suburbs. Often their days' collection would throw up surprises such as a discarded but rare book or a Staffordshire porcelain figurine which were being cleaned out of households. Kapadiwalas are often sought after by collectors of various sorts because of their erratic and often surprising capabilities of unearthing the odd stuff.

**2** Jharkhand is a state in eastern India. It was carved out of the southern part of the state of Bihar on 15 November 2000. Jharkhand shares its border with the states of Bihar to the north, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to the west, Odisha to the south, and West Bengal to the east. It has an area of 30,778 sq miles (79,710 km<sup>2</sup>). The industrial city of Ranchi is its capital and Dumka is the sub-capital while Jamshedpur is the largest and the biggest industrial city of the state.

**3** Oraon tribes or Kurukh tribe, also spelled Uraon, Oran or Oram are tribal aborigines inhabiting various states across central and eastern India as well as Bangladesh. Traditionally, Oraons depended on the forest and farms for their ritual and economic livelihood, but in recent times, a few of them have become mainly settled agriculturalists. Small numbers of Oraons have migrated to the northeastern part of India, where they are mainly employed in tea estates. Kurukh is a Dravidian language spoken by nearly two million Oraon and Kisan tribal peoples of Odisha and surrounding areas of India (Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal), as well as by 50,000 in northern Bangladesh, 28,600 a dialect called Dhangar in Nepal, and about 5,000 in Bhutan. Kurukh has a number of alternative names, some are: Uraon, Kurux, Kunruk, Kunna, Urang, Morva, and Birhor. There are also two dialects, Oraon and Kisan, that have 73 per cent intelligibility between them. Oraon is currently being standardised, Kisan is not.

**4** Sadri, also known as Nagpuri, is a branch of the Prakrit language, and is regarded as a sister language of Oriya, Bengali and Maithili. It is spoken in the Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and the north of West Bengal, and in Bangladesh.

**5** Maoist commonly refers to the armed insurrection in various parts of India against the Indian state. It is also called as Naxalite movement in reference to the Naxalbari insurrection conducted in West Bengal in 1967. The Communist Party of India (Maoist) is an underground political party in India which aims to overthrow the government of India through people's war.

**6** Phutkol Saag is a variety of wild but edible herb which are sun-dried and consumed throughout the year, especially in summer by people living in that region. There are different uses of the herb amongst indigenous people including medicinal. Phutkol Saag is cooked in various ways. One way to cook it is by adding boiled rice starch which doubles up the nutritional quality of the recipe and in a way helps fight malnutrition which is rampant in the region.

**7** *Bangla Boi* is a popular colloquial term referring to popular Bengali cinema and Bengali cinema as such. Literally its means Bengali printed books. Although it does not refer to cinema, the term probably gained wider currency from the mid-twentieth century which was the hey day of the popular Bengali cinema and when many screenplays were adapted from literary works, popular novels and short stories.



Special Issue *Everyday* April 2013

**Global** *in the* **South**

Philippine Vignettes : First impressions

Niels Mulder

## Philippine Vignettes : First impressions

Before engaging in serious research on Filipino urban middle-class mentality, similarly to my quests in Java and Thailand, I went on a two-month exploration of the Tagalog-speaking region in order to gather impressions and to identify a research site (Lucena City, some 130 kms south-east from Manila), such as set down in the ensuing text.



Niels Mulder

Niels Mulder is a cultural anthropologist who is best known for his interpretations of everyday life, as in *Inside Indonesian/Philippine/Thai/Southeast Asian Society*, and his collections on the local culture of the public world, as in *Indonesian/Filipino/Thai/Southeast Asian Images*. His publications include *Doing Java; An Anthropological Detective Story* (2006); *Doing Thailand; The Anthropologist as a Young Dog in Bangkok in the 1960s* (2008); *Professional Stranger; Doing Thailand During its Most Violent Decade* (2009). Email: [niels\\_mulder201935@yahoo.com.ph](mailto:niels_mulder201935@yahoo.com.ph)

In the arrival hall, a charming tourist hostess accosts me. She offers a map of the city and sympathises with my plan to reach the university by bus. Her explanations are clear and simple. My only confusion is what to pay for the jeep that is to take me on the final leg to the campus. It drops me off in front of the Benitez Hall. Obviously, it is not the building I am looking for. I am directed to another Benitez complex in the opposite corner of the vast university grounds. The room-sharing accommodation is basic, but at three dollars or thirty pesos a night it is OK.

After checking in, I want to know where I can have a beer. The ladies at the dorm react as if I have been asking for heroin. 'No, no, there is no liquor on campus.' Must be that silly American habit, and I wonder whether professors here also keep a bottle of bourbon in their lockers like we did at Northern Illinois University. Anyway, when I voice my distaste for soft drinks and insist that I find a beer, they tell me that I have to go into town. 'Please stay put. It is very dangerous to go there after dark.'

When I am driven by thirst, I will brave all peril. I hop on a bus and get off where I had spotted an inviting open-air place on the way up. It is only few people there, so the Lena who brings the beer takes time for a chat. She introduces herself as a promo-Lena for San Miguel. Although she does not have the archangel in mind, she is a missionary of sorts in the service of his beer. Naturally, she wants to know where I hail from and what I hope to do in the country. Then she inquires whether I am married. Her face expresses disbelief when I say I am not. Upon meeting a pretty Lena, men always suggest that they are free. When I explain that I prefer to have my peace at home, she seems to accept my bachelorhood, to which she adds, 'What a waste of a handsome man.'

When I order my second, she teaches me some Tagalog.<sup>1</sup> "Isa pa nga, that is how you say, 'one more please'." Since it strikes me as a useful phrase, I note it down. After explaining which is what, she teaches me the numerals from one to ten, and I am struck by the amazing similarity with Indonesian. Upon leaving, a few beers later, I hold a sheet full of scribbles and know how to say 'hello' and 'goodbye.' The next evening, I cannot show her how well I studied my lesson; apparently, the promo is over.

### At UP, Diliman

In the morning, I begin to make my round of colleagues at the University of the Philippines. Because I found reading Thai and Indonesian novels relevant to my research, I introduce myself to Professors Bienvenido Lumbera and Nicanor Tiongson, whose interests show considerable affinity with mine. They, together with their colleagues, are convinced that the current revival of literature in Tagalog/Filipino will yield home-grown interpretations of life and identity. Accordingly, they encourage my project of charting middle-class mentality in a provincial, Tagalog-speaking town

As a possible venue, Lumbera advises Lipa<sup>2</sup>, while Tiongson sets on historical Malolos<sup>3</sup>, and even proposes to take me there when he visits his parents. In the following days, other faculty members suggest the towns they hail from as the epitomes of Tagalog-Filipino life. It results in a handful of letters of introduction to former teachers, people at town hall and other notables. In that way, I am well equipped for exploring potential research sites.

During my talks with people in history, Filipino and English, creative writing, folklore and anthropology, I am impressed with their sense of urgency to discover, develop and define the Filipino essence. They talk about 'our true identity', which some hope to discover deep down in pre-Spanish times, or in the life and customs of the people up in the mountains and hills, or in folklore and popular religious movements. Virgilio Enriquez is developing *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, Filipino psychology, and not only rejects western models, but also the outcome of the research on Filipino values as conducted at the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) at Ateneo de Manila University. Some historians seemingly want to strip the nation of its age-long contacts with the world outside in order to understand the same 'in itself.'

I do not quite know what to do with these ideas. They are somehow orientalising themselves; looking for essential Filipino-ness, similar to my original endeavours on Java and in Thailand. Especially



as a result of my re-study in Central-Java around 1980, I have grown sceptical about the quest for essences. Be that as it may, their preoccupations with the true or not-so-true nature of life in the Islands agrees with my broad interest. Since most of the people I meet at UP are supportive of my plans, I anticipate stumbling upon many interesting interpretations when I get started. An early example came up in conversation with the anthropologist Covar whose research is on native religious movements. According to him, churches are powerhouses, much like I found temples in Thailand to be. He has a nice way of putting it, ‘Churches are neither for sinners nor for believers. They are the wellsprings that nurture religious potency and efficacy.’ Churches are places where you go to recharge your battery, so to say.

### At the Ateneo de Manila

A few days in my stay, I go to the Ateneo de Manila, just a short ride away. Like UP, it is situated on a vast campus. Since it is a Jesuit establishment, its grounds are called Loyola Heights, which is an apt name if you look down from its ridge to the low-lying Marikina district right behind it. There is something lofty about these Heights, indeed. Even as some faculty members attempt to develop—intellectualise—Tagalog as a language of scientific discourse, English is the norm. All the same, it strikes me as strange when I overhear students conversing in that language; what is wrong with using one’s native tongue?

At the Ateneo, I naturally come to the Institute of Philippine Culture whose director encourages me to affiliate with it once I get started. I will need such a connection in order to secure a long-term visa. He is also to the point in other matters, proposing to introduce me to a couple, not far from here that regularly let a part of their house to visiting scholars. When I observe that I will spend much of my time outside Manila, he thinks that things can be arranged accordingly. He picks up the telephone, and later in the afternoon I am on my way to an address on K-8th St., off K-H St. However awkward those names, the Valdehuelas are cordial people with whom it is a pleasure to stay.

### English

In the morning I share breakfast with them at a large table in the kitchen area in the basement, and if I am back early I may join them for dinner too. In that way we get to see much of each other, which allows for some glimpses of everyday life. When all are around, they converse in English—so perhaps those students at campus are not so peculiar after all. Yet, there is a hitch, as Manny, the husband, explains. Should they educate their two sons as citizens of the world or should they connect more firmly to their roots? The dilemma unfolds in the absence of the father. As long as he presides at the table, the idiom is English, even when addressing the maid or the dog. If only the mother is around, she and the kids speak English, but address maid and dog in the vernacular. When she is not present either, the boys stick to Tagalog.

As I have not advanced beyond the charming lesson at the beer garden, it is a boon that I can use English in almost any situation—even as I keep wondering about it, such as when I sat with a mainly male audience at midday mass in Makati<sup>4</sup>. Something so close to the heart as religion in a foreign tongue? Would these people also make love in English? Anyway, it illustrates what Enriquez of the Association for Philippine Psychology calls ‘the great cultural divide.’ Its hallmark is the linguistic separation of those who cherish their colonial heritage, i.e., the largely mestizo higher class, and the ordinary people, often referred to with the hybrid ‘common *tao*’, common people. It neatly expresses that those higher up consider themselves ‘special.’ Here, race, language, privilege and power have deep historical roots that have not been ruptured by a revolution for independence. This separation of the classes, their living in two different worlds, is the kernel of the problem I am confronted with at UP,



where the bridging of the gap and the quest for identity are priority.

### San Pablo and Lucena City

With Manny's efficient directions, it is not difficult to find a bus to San Pablo, the first town I want to gather some impressions of. After checking in at an 'executive hotel', I go to town hall where I am well received at the planning and development division. They are interested in having a foreign researcher around and lavish praises on their city. The director, dressed in immaculate white, is an enthusiastic tennis player and assures me that I can practise my favourite sport, 'So bring your paraphernalia!' My next objective is a printing shop, because I am dearly in need of cards. When asking directions, I chance upon a journalist who invites me home for *merienda*, i.e., an in-between-meals snack. He is a member of the Iglesia ni Cristo, explaining that its members are the moral shock-troops of the country, the only people who are incorruptible in a milieu where hanky-panky is the rule. In order to elucidate his creed, he gives me a copy of the Iglesia's magazine *Pasugo* (messenger). Further, he is critical of politics and the Roman Catholic Church, and pessimistic about the country's prospects as long as Marcos<sup>5</sup> is in power. Only then I am free to go to a printer who, sympathetic to my concerns, promises to have the cards ready by next morning.

In the evening, I want to find out whether there is any life after dark. After all, when working in a provincial town, I will need some distraction. In this respect, the urban appearance of the town is deceptive. There is very little to do. Near the market, I find a reasonable beer-house run by a couple. There are only few customers, and so all of us join in conversation. Since foreigners are scarce, they want to know everything about me, and as the beer flows, one of them keeps expressing his disbelief at the rate I pay at the executive inn, 'Mind you, eighty pesos for one sleep!' It is the equivalent of almost thirty beers or a good chunk of the monthly rent of an ordinary house.

The next morning, after collecting my calling cards, I have a lengthy conversation with a Monsignor at the convent adjoining the cathedral's monumental compound. He has his own view of the Iglesia ni Cristo, but is not eager to delve into the matter. 'You'll find out for yourself. This is a Catholic city in a Catholic country. Do not bother too much with that fringe of sects and all sorts of small churches. The main thing is that Filipinos are religious.' When I am on the bus again, the Monsignor's point seems to be confirmed by the inevitable notice 'God Bless Our Trip' and the Holy-Heart icon up front whose halo lights up when the driver puts his foot down and whose heart glows up in red when he steps on the brake.

At the terminal in the very centre of Lucena City, I am advised to check in at the Fresh Air Hotel. Then, with my bag in the room, I board a jeep all the way to the Kota area where I hope to find the remains of a fort. Unfortunately, there is nothing much to be seen, and so, because the worst heat of the day has passed, I walk back. In doing so, I become the conspicuous white man many people feel free to yell 'Hi Joe' or 'Hi man' at. However rude this may be, the 'Hi man, what are you walking for?' makes me smile, and aware that I am probably supposed to proceed in a less proletarian manner. Be that as it may, I am just in time to be accosted by one of the bystanders hanging about at town hall; pleased with his catch, Marlon promises to introduce me to whomever I would like to meet the following day.

In the morning, I want to present myself to Miss Delicia Unzon, to whom I carry a letter of introduction. As far as I know, she is a retired teacher and devotee of the Legion of Mary, well-known all over town. Her reputation notwithstanding, it takes some time before I meet a person who knows where she lives, even as I stand right in front of her house. After sounding the bell, an old servant opens part of the broad door of the two-storied house whose upper floor is wooden with shell-inlaid windows. When I tell her whom I come for, she leaves me at a closed door; two minutes later, she opens again to inquire why I want to meet Miss Unzon. I hand her the letter of introduction. Again she closes the door, to finally let me in when she opens it for a third time. We climb a broad, beautiful wooden stairway, then ushered into a vast room that smells of the past. In a business-like manner, the old teacher demands to explain my case and why, of all people, I think I need her. When she finds out that I am Dutch, she has an idea. Explaining that she is no longer much part of this world, she thinks that Engineer Faller, who studied for one or two semesters in Holland, is the right person to help me.

Faller is the head of the Water District. Since he is an engineer, his interests are rather different

from mine, but he is willing to assist me in establishing my first contacts if I decide on Lucena as a research site. Because it is close to lunch time, he invites me to an air-conditioned restaurant. He recommends the *kare-kare*, a dish of cow's knuckle and innards cooked with a variety of vegetables in a peanut sauce. I like every bite of it. Then Faller's ordeal is over, 'Please feel free to consult me whenever you are back' is the overdue aftermath of his spending a semester at Delft<sup>6</sup>.

At the city office of the mayor, I meet Marlon again. He seems to know everybody worth knowing and is amazingly efficient in introducing me to all sorts of officers affiliated with town hall, to the principal of the provincial high school and even to the bishop of the Aglipayan Church. The only person we miss is the mayor, the honourable Mario Tagarao, who is out of town on business. The next evening, though, I should not fail to join the rally of the *Ilaw ng Buhay*, 'Light-of-Life' movement presided over by his wife.

Apparently, Marlon considers me his trophy and dependent, and it is only with difficulty that I get him off my back in order to inspect Lucena's nightlife on my own. The town does not look good. It has many dilapidated buildings, ramshackle two-storied wooden structures, a good deal of squatting, but also beer houses, 'health temples', Lenaie places and restaurants galore. According to some, Lucena is famous for its nightlife, attracting people from as far as San Pablo.

On other counts, Lucena appears to be attractive, too. Although the urban population of some 45,000 is not impressive, it is an important centre of education, catering to as many as 50,000 students. Next to a private university, there are several colleges, a seminary, and a good many elementary and secondary schools. Besides, the city is the seat of government of the vast Quezon province. Because of this, I anticipate finding a vast population of educated people among whom to do my research on urban middle-class mentality.

### Hot air

As of the next day's noon, I am in the hands of Marlon again, which is a boon for a first visit but a little threatening if I decide on Lucena as my site. For the time being, though, I get a surfeit of information, which is precisely what I came for. Marlon even has a booklet of the *Ilaw ng Buhay* movement<sup>7</sup> in which it is described as a pilot-project to engage the masses with the noble intentions of their government, to make them feel that they are part of the spirit moving the country. With characteristic modesty, it acclaims that it is a unique Filipino initiative that will not only spread throughout the country, but that will serve as a model for such mobilisation movements throughout Asia. To me, it seems a clone of the right-wing, government-loyalist Village Scouts of Thailand.

In the evening this impression is validated at a meeting of many apparently ordinary folks presided over by an ostensibly higher middle-class group of ladies and a few gentlemen. It is a spirit-raising affair, with an invocation, lots of pep talk—much of it good fun—singing, games, a campfire, and, finally, dancing. As guest of honour, I am expected to open the dance with the mayor's wife.

Whereas Lucena impressed me as a likely candidate for my upcoming research, I should also gather some impressions of other big towns in the Southern Tagalog region, such as Batangas and Lipa, and the university site at Los Baños. On that leg of my exploration, I have the good fortune to chance upon a Rotarian-initiated clone of the *Oblation*, the very symbol of the University of the Philippines. On its pedestal sits a plaque with:

*To the illustrious men and women of Batangas Province<sup>8</sup> who have given, are giving or will give their lives, property, precious time, effort and love for the freedom, glory and greatness of the motherland, this monument is dedicated.*

It reminds me of that Light-of-Life brochure of a few days ago. That movement, too, was a clone, a hundred-percent copy of a rightist mobilisation effort that plays on 'the healthy sentiment of the people', and that, in the English language, was presented as an irresistible mobilisation of popular will. This plaque is another example of such humbug. All these *God bless our trip*'s, the mass said in English, being asked whether we also sing our anthem in that tongue; now that I think of it, there is something awfully fake, something awfully counterfeit about that language here.



**21 August 1983**

Then I make it back to K-8th St. to engage in a second round of meetings and information-gathering that meanwhile extends to some schools downtown and the Ermita District<sup>9</sup>. It is a heavy schedule of appointments, new acquaintanceships, listening to lectures, and even offering a few. Then, following the killing of a well-known politician, people have other things on their mind, even as the significance of that fatal 21 August<sup>10</sup> escapes me. As a result, I want to go on with my trip to the northern centres of the Tagalog region; on 25 August, Nick Tiongson takes me to meet his parents in Malolos<sup>11</sup>.

Upon arrival, he introduces me to his father at his place of work, then to his relatives at the town house. It is an old, two-storied wooden building with big, high-ceiling rooms. It accords a place of honour to a life-size statue of a female saint who is paraded in the holy-week procession. Apart from that, she must be quite an impressive lady, since she was able to avert the fire raging at the neighbour's to spread to the house through facing it. Sometime after lunch, Nick travels back to Manila in order to join in some demonstration relating to the killed politician. This leaves me free to visit town hall and the historic cathedral where the first constitution was deliberated. Later, when having a beer on the central square, two elderly men want me to share in their anger at Marcos. Never before in Southeast Asia had I hear such frustration vented in public; they almost shouted out, and gradually the enormity of what happened on 21 August dawns on me. Comparing with ideas gathered in Thailand and Java, I cannot help thinking that a ruler who has lost respect, has also lost his mandate, and cannot last.

In retrospect, I should have gone to Manila to be with the funeral that turned out to be the biggest anti-Marcos demonstration ever. I was new, however, and could neither understand the event's portent, nor did I feel to be part of it, as I was still blissfully ignorant of the momentous place of politics in Philippine life. So, after getting some ideas about Malolos, I went on to Cabanatuan. There, again, my ignorance caught up with me when I noted the historical marker of General Luna's murder at the time when the war against the Americans was on. Perhaps Aquino's assassination is nothing new under the Philippine sun; where power is at stake, the goal justifies all means.

Next to this pockmark of history, Cabanatuan seems small, agricultural and provincial. The most impressive part of it is its necropolis to the immediate south. The place is full of Greek pillars, giant angels and two-storied mausoleums that provide interesting clues about who is, or rather, who was, among the first families, whose dead enjoy a standard of living well beyond the hopes of ordinary men.

***Pilipinolojiya***

Back in Manila, I fall into the hands of the *Pilipinolohistas* of UP, Diliman. They are obsessed by their message, and they see colonialism in every nook and cranny; foreigners, missionaries, mestizos and highly educated Filipinos as like devils that appropriate the Filipino soul. All these people discourse in English and proclaim that *pakikisama*— going along with others, and thus willingness to compromise and give in— is the supreme Filipino value; they take the surface for reality and naively apply European psychology to understand the stirrings of the Filipino soul. These foreigners and highly educated people are strangers in this land. They are separated from the masses by 'the great cultural divide' and, because of it, they are ignorant of their roots.

*We, at the university, must go against the onslaught of foreign, colonially inspired conceptualisation. Work on Filipinos should be done and written in the national language, in Filipino; Filipinos are not just giving in to others, they empathise with each other. It is up to us to dig for the roots, to formulate true Filipino culture and identity, and to come to grips with a psychology that does not set people apart from each other as independent personalities, but that is based on the unity of self and others.*

I am in no position to judge these claims, but an interesting battle seems to be going on between the sober scholars at the Ateneo de Manila and the impassioned *Pilipinolohistas* at UP. Of course, the former will not deny the linguistic separation between the educated and the *common tao*, or that those on the privileged side are often recognisable mestizos, and that their being apart has deep historical roots, but they do not seem excited about it. Instead of looking for a Filipino-ness or 'true identity' that has been

lost, they accept the present as the basis to work from.

Nonetheless, a lively debate is going on about what it means to be Filipino in which even the Marcos government is taking part. It is not so much interested in scholarly exchanges, but goes its own way in commissioning descriptive studies on Philippine groups and their way of life. Part of that way—and often a pointer to mentality—is in religion. Studies on aspects of religious life are very popular right now. Often sects are supposed to reveal old ways of thinking that tenaciously hold their own in spite of change. Through studying one of these groups, Covar claims that Filipino religiosity is animistic rather than orthodox, and that it serves as the source of potency. This is corroborated by studies on Catholics and other sectarian movements.

This, in its turn, stimulated a Jesuit to write on Filipino gullibility. According to him and some fellow priests, the hypothesis about individual potency contains much truth. They describe the faithful as individual-centred—they come to church for their personal reasons; not because they want to commune and be part of the parish. They thus describe the bond between Church and congregation as weak. ‘Yes, people here are full of faith, but can hardly be motivated to be parochially active.’ Religiously, they are individualists that have, according to Bulatao, no qualms about confessing to high moral standards, yet do as they please.

It is not only at UP and the Ateneo that I meet this interest in religion. At the Religious Studies Department of De la Salle University, students are researching ‘Asian religiosity.’ Some of them concentrate on the Iglesia ni Cristo, others in faith healing, fortune-telling and herbal medicine. It is interesting that this hotchpotch is called religion.

Meanwhile, people seem to have recover their senses after the killing of Benigno ‘Ninoy’ Aquino two weeks ago. Weird as it may seem, the fateful event inspires hope; the Marcosses have become intolerable; ‘we need to protest, to forget our fear.’ That was the message at a nightly meeting at the Ateneo with Aquino’s younger brother Butz<sup>xii</sup>, who incited the students with his call for civil disobedience and solemn-playful protest, such as all vehicles sounding their horns at a certain hour of the day, or lighting a candle on the window sill every evening at eight. However blatant the killing and however much disliked, the durable dictator seems to be well-entrenched, and I will not be amazed if he is still around by the time I will be back to begin my research.

There is one more thing I learned at the Ateneo when I met an American visiting professor. To teach here, he has come over with his family, including two kids of high-school age. Since they live in a subdivision right behind the school, he thinks it a matter-of-course that the two of them walk to school. The problem that arises, though, is that they are chided because of it, as if the family is too poor to have them chauffeured to their hall of learning, in the same way as most of the other students. It seems to be a status-conscious society and, like I experienced in Thailand, status must be shown; it is a social obligation.

For this time I am satisfied with the reconnaissance. It will be nice to set foot in Amsterdam again.

---

**1. Tagalog** is an Austronesian language spoken as a first language by a quarter of the population of the Philippines and as a second language by most of the rest. It is the first language of the Philippine region IV, of Bulacan and of Metro Manila. Its standardized form, officially named *Filipino*, is the national language and one of two official languages of the Philippines, the other being English. It is related to other Philippine languages such as Ilokano, Bisayan, and Kapampangan, and more distantly to other Austronesian languages such as Hawaiian and Malagasy. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tagalog\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tagalog_language) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**2** The **City of Lipa** is a first class component city in the province of Batangas in the Philippines. It is one of the three cities in Batangas (the others are Batangas City and Tanauan). It is located 78 kilometres (48 mi) south of Manila and, according to the 2011 estimate, has a population of 287,170. The city is in the center of Region IV, at the heart of Batangas Province. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lipa\\_City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lipa_City) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**3** **Malolos** officially the **City of Malolos**, is a first class urban component city in the Republic of the Philippines. Malolos is considered as the 115th city in the country. It is the capital city of the province of Bulacan as the seat of

the provincial government. The city is 45 kilometres (28 mi) north of Manila, the capital city of the Philippines. Malolos was the site of the constitutional convention of 1898, known as the Malolos Convention, that led to the establishment of the First Philippine Republic, at the sanctuary of the Barasoain Church. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malolos> accessed on 2.06.2013.

**4 The City of Makati** in the Philippines, is one of the sixteen cities that make up Metro Manila. Makati is the financial center of the Philippines and one of the major financial, commercial and economic hubs in Asia. The major banks, corporations, department stores as well as foreign embassies are based in Makati. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makati> accessed on 2.06.2013.

**5 Ferdinand Emmanuel Edralin Marcos, Sr.** (September 11, 1917–September 28, 1989) was President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986. He was a lawyer, member of the Philippine House of Representatives (1949–1959) and a member of the Philippine Senate (1959–1965). He was Senate President from 1963–1965. In 1983, his government was accused of being involved in the assassination of his primary political opponent, Benigno Aquino, Jr. Public outrage over the assassination served as the catalyst for the People Power Revolution in February 1986 that led to his removal from power and eventual exile in Hawaii. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand\\_Marcos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_Marcos) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**6 Delft University of Technology**, also known as **TU Delft**, is the largest and oldest Dutch public technical university, located in Delft, Netherlands. With eight faculties and numerous research institutes, it hosts over 19,000 students, more than 3,300 scientists and more than 2,200 people in the support and management staff. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delft\\_University\\_of\\_Technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delft_University_of_Technology) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**7 The "Ilaw ng Buhay"** (Light of Life) program pilot-tested from 1978 to 1981 in several municipalities and cities in the Philippines was conceptualized during a three-month assessment conference participated in by the pioneers of community development led by Atty. Ramon P. Binamira, considered the Father of Community Development; technical specialists in disciplines related to backyard food production, nutrition, environmental management, health and family planning; and young interns from the Department of Human Ecology, University of the Philippines at Los Banos, who eventually served as the planning and research staff after their graduation. Initially, it was named as a Movement but eventually this was changed to Program to make it more acceptable in those days of the martial law regime which considered as illegal any assembly of more than three people. URL: [http://nestormpestelos.blogspot.in/2012/11/lessons-from-ilaw-ng-buhay-light-of\\_14.html](http://nestormpestelos.blogspot.in/2012/11/lessons-from-ilaw-ng-buhay-light-of_14.html) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**8 Batangas** is a first class province of the Philippines located on the southwestern part of Luzon in the CALABARZON region. Its capital is Batangas City and it is bordered by the provinces of Cavite and Laguna to the north and Quezon to the east. Across the Verde Island Passages to the south is the island of Mindoro and to the west lies the South China Sea. Poetically, Batangas is often referred to by its ancient name Kumintang. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batangas> accessed on 2.06.2013.

**9 Ermita** is a district of Manila and is a major commercial, financial, and cultural center of the city. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ermita,\\_Manila](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ermita,_Manila) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**10 The assassination of Benigno Simeon "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr.** (November 27, 1932 – August 21, 1983), was a Filipino Senator and a former Governor of Tarlac. Aquino, together with Gerry Roxas and Jovito Salonga, formed the leadership of the opposition to the government of President Ferdinand Marcos. He was assassinated at the Manila International Airport in 1983 upon returning from his self-imposed exile. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benigno\\_Aquino,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benigno_Aquino,_Jr.) accessed on 2.06.2013.

**11 Agapito Aquino** is a former representative of the second District of the Makati City and senator from 1987 to 1995 of the Philippine Congress. URL: [http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=Agapito\\_Aquino](http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=Agapito_Aquino) accessed on 2.06.2013.



Special Issue

*April 2013*

**Everyday**  
**Global** *in the* **South**

Memory of Images, Jadavpur

Avik Mukhopadhyay

# Photo Essay

## Memory of Images, Jadavpur



Avik Mukhopadhyay

Avik Mukhopadhyay is a three-time national award winning cinematographer and filmmaker. He received postgraduate diploma from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune in 1993, and has been working in the field thereafter. Avik has played a pioneering role in contemporary Indian cinema by producing a unique visual style and new sensibilities. He has shot art-house landmarks like *Chokherbali* (2003), as well as blockbusters namely *Bunty Aur Babli* (2005), *Bhooter Bhabishyat* (2012) etc. Some of his major films include *Asukh* (1999), *Paromitar Ekdin* (2000), *Patal Ghar* (2003), *Raincoat* (2004), *Antar Mahal* (2005), *Dosar* (2006), *The Last Lear* (2007), *Antaheen* (2009), *Chitrangada* (2012) etc. *Ekti Tarar Khonje* (2010) was his first directorial film. Email: [abhikmukhopadhyay@gmail.com](mailto:abhikmukhopadhyay@gmail.com)

# MEMORY OF IMAGES, BANGALURU

Photo-essay by Avik Mukhopadhyay  
Text by Madhuj Mukherjee

Once upon a time there was a public sector factory that was more beautiful than the others. It had large buildings, big grounds and huge factory-sheds with spectacular sky-lights.





After its inception National Instruments Ltd., Jadavpur, began designing and producing opto-mechanical and opto-electronic instruments. The Jadavpur unit was built in 1957, and seemed like a memorial of our modernity.





*Still, along with a number of factories set up in and around  
Jadavpur, it bore a curse, and its people were destined not to  
wake up from deep slumber, one day.*





As days passed by, the two thousand people who worked at NIL forgot about this curse. They were often careless and carefree.



As the sun rose high up in the sky, they made infra-red search lights, passive binoculars, theodolites, night vision optical devices and so on. Yet, they did not recognize that a dreadful night was impending.

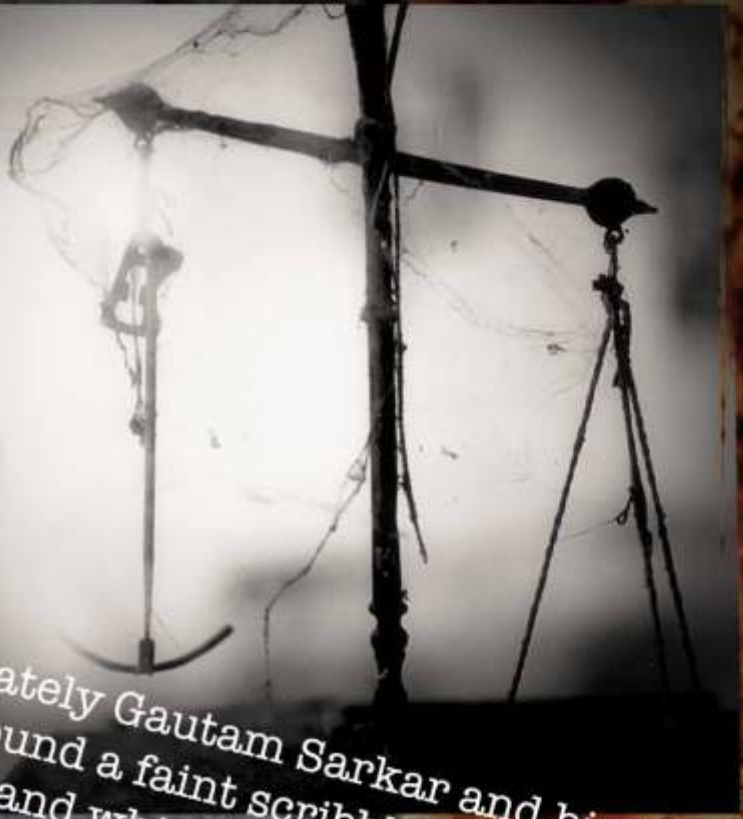


Gradually as the sun began to move towards the western sky; the watchdog barked and warned about the forthcoming danger.



Realizing that a strange night was fast approaching, the management called out for partners (during 2002). No one heard or replied.





Almost immediately Gautam Sarkar and his leader Mukunda Das found a faint scribbling on the drilling machine. It bled and whispered "Historic VRS Day" (14th March, 2003).


Gautam and Mukunda felt dozy. The curse had indeed struck them. They discovered that some of their colleagues had fallen asleep inside the factory, and even in the corridors. They tried to wake them up.



They picked up many of their sleeping friends, but their souls were left behind. They left behind personal belongings like note books, diaries, letters, photographs, combs, brushes, mugs, glasses, bags, shirts, slippers and boxes.



Every soul working in the factory - labourers, officers, guards, peons, clerks, errands, canteen boys, cooks and machines - all fell into a deep sleep, wherever they were at that very moment.



Not a sound was to be heard, nothing moved except for the clocks, but when they too ran down, they stopped, and time stopped with them.



Not even the faintest rustle was to be heard, only the wind whistling round the rooms, not a single voice.





Then years passed by. Inside the factory, dust settled like alluring sheets of amnesia. In a few years, thick undergrowth of dust covered all accounts.





As Jadavpur University  
acquired the factory premises  
in 2009 we walked in, in order  
to construe a past. However,  
since we were no princes,  
nothing came around from this  
deep slumber.





**“TODAY, ON THE SAME TRACKS THE SUN SHINES.  
WE GO SLOWLY ALONG THEM, LOOKING FOR WHAT?”**





Between the skin of the walls, the black marks on the window panes, threads taken from the cobwebs, broken lamp sheds, shirts hanging like skeletons, and lenses looking like pre-historic eye-ball and so on, what can on hope to recover?



Such remains of our developmental narratives, can only remind us of similar discontinued stories; and perhaps, convey to us that our histories may have been recorded somewhere and somehow, through the unsuspectingly vision of National 35 Still cameras.



Note: The black and white images have been shot with Mamyia 645 camera, 80 mm lens, FUJI FILM Neopan 400 ASA film stock.  
Acknowledgement: The Media Lab and Dr. Moinak Biswas.

Reference:

Basu, Anustup. "A Memorialization Without Destinying...."  
'Journal of the Moving Image' No. 10 (December 2011): 122-139  
Resnais, Alain. 'Night and Fog' (1955)  
'Sleeping Beauty', the original tale.



Special Issue

April 2013

**Everyday**  
**Global** *in the* **South**

House of Images, Sealdah  
Madhuja Mukherjee

# Photo Essay

## House of Images, Sealdah



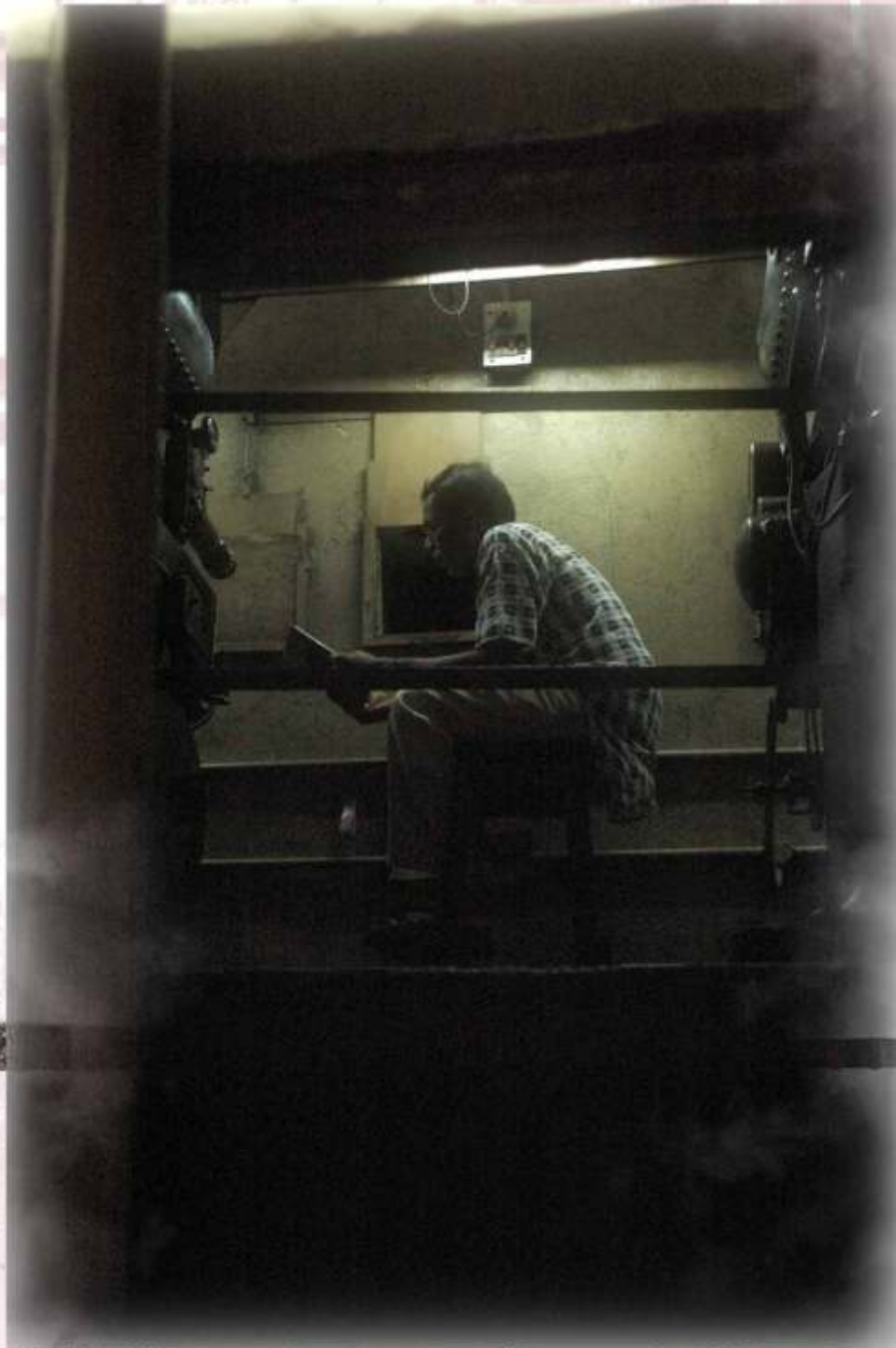
Madhuja Mukherjee

Madhuja Mukherjee teaches in the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Mukerjee is the author of *New Theatres Ltd.*, *The Emblem of Art*, *The Picture of Success*, Pune: National Film Archive of India, 2009 and has edited the anthology *Aural Films, Oral Cultures, Essays on Cinema from the Early Sound Era* (Jadavpur University Press, Kolkata, 2012). *Voices and Verses of the Talking Stars* (within the School of Women's Studies' Reader series) from Stree, Kolkata, is her forthcoming book. Email: [madhuja\\_m@yahoo.co.in](mailto:madhuja_m@yahoo.co.in)

## House of Images, Sealdah

**Photo-essay by Madhuja Mukherjee**  
**Photographs by Avik Mukhopadhyay**

“Everything from cinema architecture, decorations, the organization of the compound, ventilation and seating arrangements helped to construct the physical and spatial sense of film viewing...”.  
Stephen Hughes (2010)



'Chhabighar' (/House of Images) located at Sealdah area, was setup in 1930, with a seating capacity of approximately 600 people. This middle-class Bengali cinema is close to an important railway station, a whole-sale bazaar, lines of shops selling various household products, two colleges, guest houses etc.



On one side, Chhabighar is somewhat close to a well-known red light area (if one were to take a short-cut); on the other, if one walks a mile or so, the Calcutta University is down the road.

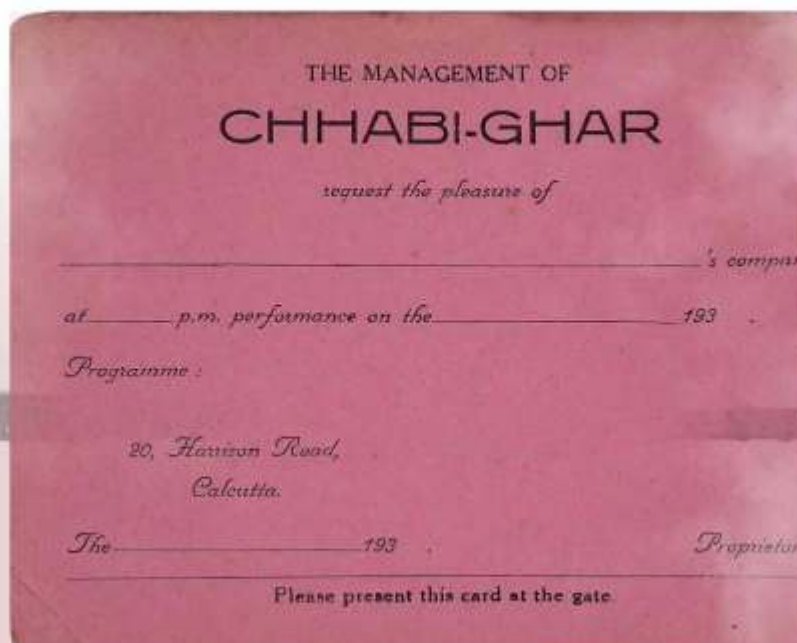


(Personal collection, 'Song Book' of one of the films released at Chhabighar)

During the 1930s, especially with the rise of the big studios, cinemas like Rupbani (inaugurated by the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore), Chitra (inaugurated by the nationalist leader Subhash Chandra Bose), New Cinema (inaugurated by the popular author and National Congress activist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay) etc., became significant places for cultural transactions.



Cinemas like Rupbani, Chitra, Minar etc., in the North, Chhabighar, Prachi etc., at the Centre, and Bijoli, Purna etc., in the South of Kolkata, became fashionable cultural sites/sights.



(Chhabighar invitation card. 'You are Welcome!')

Set up with new sound equipments of the 1930s and attempting to produce a sense of middle-class taste, Chhabigar's story, as chronicled by it's Manager Rabin Seth (during June 2010), gives us an account of the shifting industrial conditions of this regional industry, particularly during 1960s to 1980s.







While one of the biggest hits of the 1960s was 'Goopi Gayen Bhagha Bayen' (Dir. Satyajit Ray, 1969) that was shown in the theatre for thirty-three weeks, by the late 1970s the film industry seemed to have weakened, as there were very little investments because of the shrinking market.



In 1979,  
there were repeat releases  
of 'Lalubhulu'  
(Dir. Agradoot, 1959),  
'Khudita Pashan'  
(Dir. Tapan Sinha, 1960),  
and 'Charulata'  
(Dir. Satyajit Ray, 1964),  
which was followed by  
seventeen days of lockout  
in 1983.





Immediately, the show-house re-organized itself by releasing the Amitabh Bachchan starrer 'Bemisal' (Dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1982); nevertheless, it was eventually shut down soon for two years unto 1985.





Indeed, the 1980s were the weakest years of the Indian film industry in general. For the local Bengali film industry, which had a relatively smaller market, it was further difficult.

And, barring few hits like 'Bhalobasha, Bhalobasha' (Dir. Tarun Majumdar, 1985), 'Ekanto Apan' (Dir. Biresh Chattopadhyay, 1987) etc., this period experienced a steady decline of the popularity of Bengali middle-class cinema.





During this period, Chhabighar screened several Hindi hits, and also re-released popular Suchitra Sen-Uttam Kumar melodramas like 'Pathe Holo Deri' (Dir. Agradoot, 1957).



As a kid, I lived quite close to Chhabighar, and I remember watching the re-released old films with my grandmother, who was regular in these theatres with separate 'ladies' seats. Moreover, the coloured song sequence of the film seemed magical, since most of the Bengali films of that time continued to be made in black and white.

While in the post-2000 period, the theatre was renovated and was fitted with air conditioning, Dolby sound etc., a study of Chhabighar demonstrates the gradual deterioration of the industry as a whole.

As its stature shrunk, by and large the popularity of Bengali cinema went down, and the market became smaller. This was also the moment when single theatres began to lose its regular audiences.





At the time we visited the theatre (in 2010), Chhabighar was showing one of the recent Bengali movies ('Le Cchakka' (Dir. Raj Chakraborty, 2010) ; nevertheless, the house was largely unoccupied despite the fact that the film was assumed to be successful.



Just as the Bengali film industry is seemingly resurging with the opening up of the Diaspora market as well as the multiplexes now screening certain Bengali films; curiously, the threat to such regional industries is not from the 'above' (or from Bollywood and elsewhere), but the damage is apparently done from 'below'.

First, because of the video boom during the late 1970s and the 1980s, as well as due to the emergence of the local clubs, which hire VHS/DVD players and screen movie outside the theatres.

Secondly, because of the contemporary digital practices and image sharing, and the ways in which viewing habits have altered through TV, cable networks and the presence of the home video systems.

Thirdly, because of the changes in the distribution-exhibition regulations as well as due to multiple lands disputes (as in the case of 'Chitra' now 'Mitra').







However, this is neither the story of the downfall of single theatres, nor a narrative of lament. Histories of such transformations show how cinema is a part of the larger political-economic shifts, and can present us conspicuous accounts of the survival of the weaker.

(Photographs of Chhabigar exterior and that of the video shop have been taken by Madhuja Mukherjee).

**Reference:**

Hughes, Stephen P., 'When Film Came to Madras', *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*, no. 1, July 2010, pp. 147-168.  
Srinivas, S V. 'Is There a Public in the Cinema Hall?' from <http://www.frameworkonline.com/Issue/2svs.html>  
'Unsettling Cinema' Issue of Seminar, 525, May 2003.



Special Issue

**Everyday** *April 2013*  
**Global** *in the*  
**South**

Report on the Cultural Studies Workshop

Manas Ray

## Report on the Cultural Studies Workshop

• Report



Manas Ray

Manas Ray is Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC). He is also the editor of *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, the journal of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.  
Email: [manas04@gmail.com](mailto:manas04@gmail.com)

Volume 9 No.2 APRIL 2013

www.sephismagazine.org

The seventeenth Cultural Studies Workshop (CSW), organised by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC), was held at Santiniketan, West Bengal from 25 to 29 January 2013. The theme for this year was *Cultures of Everyday Life*. Like most of the times in the past, Manas Ray functioned as the coordinator of the Workshop. The other members of the Workshop Committee were: Tapati Guha-Thakurta (Director), Lakshmi Subramaniam (Dean, Academic), Partha Chatterjee, Rosinka Chaudhuri, Dwaipayan Bhattacharyay and Anirban Das. Kavita Bhowal looked after the administrative functions of the workshop in the capacity of Programme Assistant.

### The Workshop Over the Years

Cultural Studies Workshop (CSW) has perhaps been the most high profile of the CSSSC's activities. Framed as an annual pedagogic event over six days (with one break-day in the middle), the workshop ran uninterrupted for long sixteen years from 1995 until 2011 when it had to be suspended for lack of funds. In its initial years, the Workshop was funded by DANIDA, a development organisation of the Danish government through its ENRECA project. Subsequently, the workshop was funded by SEPHIS and Ford Foundation. Even though both the agencies have expressed their unambiguous satisfaction with the performance of CSW, they were in no position to offer sponsorship indefinitely. The last workshop that was held with their support was in Jaipur (2011). After a gap of one year (2012), the workshop was resumed this year, thanks to the partial funding received through the Cultural Grants Scheme of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India and also from the Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council for Social Sciences Research. The remaining funds were made available by the CSSSC itself. However, the duration of the Workshop was cut short by a day, primarily as a cost-cutting measure.

### The Theme: *Cultures of Everyday Life*

Drawing on a tradition of scholarship of thinkers like Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, recent decades have witnessed remarkable advances in understanding the ordinary, repetitive life of the everyday. This is largely due to the coming closer of different disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences, and the parallel rise of cultural studies as a new mode of producing and organising knowledge. The seventeenth Cultural Studies Workshop proposed to participate in these explorations of the intellectual, cultural and political aspects of the everyday and broaden their scope by throwing light on different features of contemporary Indian life. It discussed the specificities of the everyday as a temporal and spatial category; the myriad strategies of contestation, governmentality and claims to citizenship as they work out at an everyday, micrological level; the dispersal of power and the texture of affect; the gendered realities of the everyday; the effects of commodification upon cultural practices; everyday objects and technologies, and the discursive and semiotic registers of the everyday in literary and aesthetic activities.

Cultural Studies Workshop is primarily intended to give young researchers an opportunity to share their work with some of the faculty of the CSSSC and other senior scholars in the field. Over the years, the workshop has played a key institutional role in the emergence of cultural studies as a discipline and concerns itself with the broader issues of social sciences and humanities today as viewed from a cultural studies perspective. It is aimed at doctoral and postdoctoral students and young lecturers (below the age of 35) whose ongoing or recently completed work focuses on one or more of the issues listed above.

The call for proposal saw a very substantive response. We had a total of 123 from all over India. These were subject to a fairly rigorous selection process taken up by a sub-committee set up for the same.



Workshop session in progress.

We selected nineteen scholars who participated and presented their papers in the afternoon sessions.

The morning session of each day was devoted to faculty presentations based on a select number of readings. Under the anchorage of this year's theme, each session was addressed to a specific topic. The two speakers and the chair spoke for half an hour each. The chair had the additional duty of conducting the question-answer session. The topics of this year were:

Day 1 - ***Theorizing the Everyday*** - Speakers: Udaya Kumar (Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi) and Sibaji Bandyopadhyay (Professor of Cultural Studies, CSSSC) and chaired by Manas Ray (Associate Professor of Cultural Studies, CSSSC)

Day 2 - ***Quotidian Histories***- Speakers: Pradip Kumar Datta (Professor of Political Science, University of Delhi) and Bodhisattva Kar (Senior Lecturer in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town) and chaired by Partha Chatterjee (Honorary Professor of CSSSC and Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University).

Day 3 - ***The Everyday State*** - Speakers: Aditya Nigam (Professor, Centre for the Study in Developing Societies) and Dwaipayana Bhattacharyya (Associate Professor of Political Sciences, CSSSC) and chaired by Partha Chatterjee.

Day 4 - ***Regimes of Representation*** - Speakers: Sambuddha Sen (Professor of English,



University of Delhi) and Rosinka Chaudhuri (Professor of Cultural Studies, CSSSC) and chaired by Tapati Guha-Thakurta (Director and Professor of History, CSSSC)

The workshop followed the usual format of readings and discussions in the morning and student presentations in the afternoon session. The format worked well as resource persons in the morning led the discussions on the key readings for an hour and a half after which the floor was open for discussion for an hour allowing ample time for participants to intervene and engage in an extended dialogue on the theme and readings of the morning. The participants felt that such extensive discussion on their work had not happened before; the morning sessions too worked very well although some thought that it could have been longer.

The pre-lunch session included one paper presentation by participants followed by four more after lunch. Each participant was given twenty minutes to make the presentation. This was followed by the comments of a discussant specifically assigned and then a general discussion on the paper for half an hour. In most cases, participants felt that discussants had taken a lot of care and attention and had opened up the discussion in a constructive way and offered new departures. Many participants were of the view that never before had they had such extensive discussion on their research topic.

The workshop involved four days of intense and stimulating deliberations. On the evening of the second day a party was organised that provided gaiety, much needed after the exhausting schedule of the workshop. The workshop provided a platform for participants from different parts of the country and background to interact and make strong academic and social connections. This came out in the feedback session that was organised after the workshop. Between Day 2 and Day 3 of the workshop was the break-

day when arrangements were made for visit to Visvabharati and sightseeing in and around Santiniketan. Those interested visited Rabindra Bhavana (Tagore's museum), Kala Bhavan (Department of Art and Sculpture), Sriniketan (Department of Cottage Industry). Some also made a trip to Amar Kutir, an institute of handicrafts, Khoai and other nearby places of interest.

The open feedback session raised some issues regarding the structuring and format of the workshop. The participants were unanimous in their endorsement of the morning sessions, which they thought were excellent and insightful and helped them clarify their own understanding. There was hardly any reservation expressed about the readings of the morning sessions, although a couple of participants felt that it would have been better if these were circulated earlier. There was also a specific recommendation for small group discussion sessions around specific readings that would facilitate more interaction among the participants.

Almost all participants were very positive about the workshop and regarded it a unique experience in their academic life. Virtually every single participant felt that the discussions on their specific paper were extremely helpful and expressed the wish of having them in a recorded format. They hoped that the connections they had made would be followed up even after the workshop was over.

All the participants registered their deep appreciation of the logistical facilities provided by the organisers of the workshop, in particular to Kavita Bhowal (Programme Assistant) and Dilip Saha (Administration). The coordinator, Manas Ray, expressed his appreciation of Pradip Kumar Sengupta, the Registrar of CSSSC, for his support and encouragement.



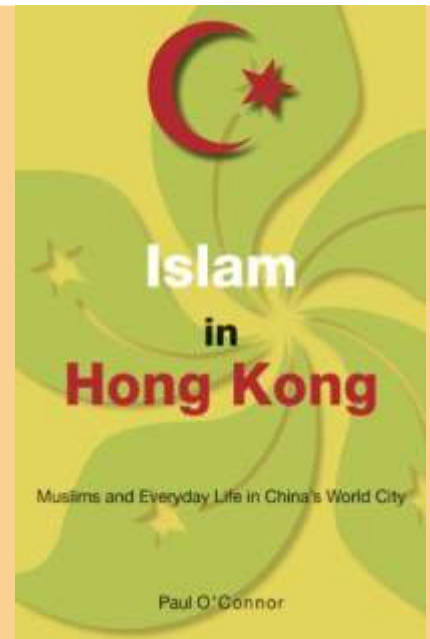
Special Issue *Everyday* April 2013

**Global** *in the* **South**

An Unusual Vignette

Kingshuk Chatterjee

# An Unusual Vignette



**Kingshuk Chatterjee** is Assistant Professor at the Department of History, University of Calcutta. His doctoral work was on the intellectual origins of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, at the same university. Chatterjee is the Deputy Director, Centre for Pakistan and West Asian Studies and is guest faculty at the Institute of Foreign Policy Studies, Calcutta University. Chatterjee has contributed in a number of publications on international politics of the Middle East and political Islam. Email: [kchat18@gmail.com](mailto:kchat18@gmail.com)

●  
*Review*



**Kingshuk Chatterjee**

[Review of: Paul O'Connor,  
*Islam in Hong Kong: Muslims  
and Everyday Life in China's  
World City*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 2012]

In the last few decades, there has emerged a veritable flood of scholarly and amateur works on Islam and/or Muslims. While some of these works have been outstanding in terms of the erudition and reflection that went into their making, a considerably larger number of works have tended to appear simply because a market has appeared for books on Islam – particularly since 9/11. Most of these works are not likely to have much shelf-life, vanishing presumably as the hatred/antipathy towards, and ignorance of, Islam (which spawned such literature in the first place) would also – hopefully – diminish. Much of this literature on Islam and Muslims has tried to understand the complexity of Islam and the Muslim identity, from the standpoints of both insiders and outsiders, in a global environment that has often tended to look askance at these.

O'Connor's book on Islam and Muslim Life in Hong Kong, I would wager, stands a decent chance of having a reasonable shelf-life, largely because it is – thankfully – **not** about Islam. For sure, it deals with Muslim life (and that is not the same as Islam), but it limits the compass of the work to the extremely unusual set of



experiences of Muslims living in the city of Hong Kong. Part of a series of works on the culture and society of Hong Kong, O'Connor's work attempts to present before us an anthropological sliver of the city's life – concentrating on a small community of people (three per cent of the whole population) bound by their religion, despite coming from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds.

A lecturer in anthropology in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, O'Connor has basically woven together an immensely readable tapestry of images from the lives of Muslims living in Hong Kong – the Hui, Pakistanis, Indonesians, a handful of Indians, to name but a few. It takes as its points of entry what are often taken to be some standard markers of Muslim life – community halls for prayers and congregation, Islamic education centres, *halaal* food, observing the fast during *ramadhan*, etc – and situates these in the specific context of the lived experience of Muslims in Hong Kong. Some of the nicest bits about the book deal with matters like the *Mcharam* foods of McDonald, regaling the reader with how the food giant was steadily persuaded by its Muslim customers to use vegetable oil for frying their food. It also lays similarly refreshing light on some problems that seldom attract any attention from non-Muslims: what it means to have a full workday on Friday and the weekly holiday on Sunday, especially if the people concerned have grown up accustomed to having their day of rest on Friday; or, observing the fast of *ramadhan* in a cultural milieu that appears to be blissfully unmindful about what the period means for Muslims.

The most delightful feature of the book is the author's passionate association with his adopted city. The fascinating details about the city itself, the gentle care with which the word-portraits conjure up the images of the city, the loving familiarity with not merely the various quarters of the city but also with the people who inhabit these quarters – all these allow the reader to see the city through O'Connor's eyes, which is becoming an increasingly rare kind of penmanship. The chapter on 'transformation' of the colonial city of Hong Kong into the World City of the People's Republic, with a demographic profile unlike any other Chinese city anywhere in the mainland, conveys with some dexterity the problems faced by a city like Hong Kong in absorbing people from different countries – for instance introducing anti-racism laws to making Indonesian domestic workers feel at home in the city.

O'Connor's familiarity with Muslim life in Hong Kong, however, does not necessarily serve any purpose in establishing any general maxim for the understanding the fundamental attributes of Muslim life – probably because any such essentialisation is misleading and simplistic as an approach. The chapter on 'Learning to be a Muslim', for instance, deals with the challenge of crafting the problematic 'Muslim' identity – as though there is something definite about being a Muslim that transcends space and time. O'Connor begins in a clear-sighted manner, classifying the respondents in his research among those who were raised for all practical purposes in Hong Kong (i.e. in a non-Muslim social and cultural milieu), and those who were raised in 'Muslim' surroundings. O'Connor then identifies community education centres (schools and colleges) as the principal 'official' engine of crafting the Muslim consciousness among the Hong Kong Muslims. He, however, clearly indicates an awareness among respondents that the explanations about Islamic practices that are given in Muslim schools and colleges are different from what the respondents (Pakistanis, mostly) are told at home. The author's unspoken implication is that the standardised explanation provided in the Muslim educational centres is mindful of the existence of the majority non-Muslim Chinese students of these institutions, while the explanations provided at home are the more authentic explanations. This assumes that there is any 'authentic' version of Islam (also implying the rest are not) – there are strong reasons to dispute such an assumption, because 'Muslim' identities are negotiated in almost every specific social and cultural setting, regardless of whether Muslims are in a majority or minority. The meaning of 'Muslim' in Pakistan is not the same as in Malaysia or Indonesia, or elsewhere, for that matter. Thus when a Pakistani 'learns to be a Muslim' in Hong Kong, this may have something in common with how an Indonesian approaches the matter. But there are also noticeable differences – a distinction that does not become very obvious in what O'Connor makes of the question.

It is true that O'Connor is not the only author attempting to make a case study of Muslim life to figure out the negotiation strategies adopted by Muslims all over the world, but his work shares some of the more common problems vitiating many such works. He assumes that the standard markers of Muslim

identity are necessarily its defining attributes (Friday congregations, regular prayers, preoccupation with dietary restrictions, matrimonial considerations), without exploring whether these markers are necessarily the same in situations of Muslim majority as well as minority life. His familiarity with literature on other situations of Muslim life where they make up the minority community is much less than adequate – presumably because he is looking at Muslim life in Hong Kong, rather than Muslim life in general – but that leaves him much less than adequately equipped to fathom the complexities of Muslim life in a minority situation, let alone that in general.

That said, the book is a refreshing attempt to study Muslim life, with a not-more-than-tangential reference to other preoccupations about Islam and Muslims that have characterised much of the ocean of literature on Islam that have hit the stands. O'Connor dispenses with equations like Islam and discontent/terrorism, and looks at the lives of ordinary Muslims living normal lives conscious of their own identities. The book arouses in the reader more questions about Muslim life in China than it answers: Is the attitude of the Hong Kong authorities towards Muslims even remotely similar in its essence to that of Beijing towards Muslims who are Chinese nationals (such as those in Yunnan or Xinjiang)? If it is not (as it seems to be the case), is it simply because that Hong Kong needs to be different from the rest of the country, or is it likely to suggest fresh possibilities of negotiation to Chinese Muslims vis-à-vis the overwhelmingly Han people of China? The book is worth a read in order to tease oneself with such suggestive possibilities as much as to get a flavour of the delightfully cosmopolitan experience of Hong Kong and its engagement with the global community of Muslims.



Editor: Professor Samita Sen  
*sensamita@yahoo.co.uk*



Editorial Assistant : Romit Chowdhury  
*chowdhury.romit@gmail.com*



Editorial Assistant : Kashshaf Ghani  
*kashshaf@hotmail.com*



Design Assistance : Hardik Brata Biswas  
*hardikbb@gmail.com*



Administrative Assistant : Joyanti Sen  
*sachetana@vsnl.net*



On-Line Assistance : Sadik Bhimani  
*sadikbhimani@gmail.com*



DTP Assistance : Pradipta Saha  
*pradiptasaha78@gmail.com*